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Allegiances

[image]

AirClan

Leader: Owlstar - Fawn-and-white she-cat with yellow eyes.

Deputy: Foxnose - Ginger tom with dark green eyes. Scarred muzzle. Some white parts.

Medicine Cat: Crystalwing - Blue calico she-cat with blue eyes.
Apprentice - Blossompaw

Warriors: Mousefoot - Grey tabby tom with orange eyes. Scar on left shoulder.
Apprentice - Rockpaw

Wolflungs - White tabby tom with yellow eyes and grey-black stripes.
Apprentice - Treepaw

Flamepelt - Bright ginger tabby tom with red stripes and pale green eyes. Fluffy mane of fur around neck.
Apprentice - Skunkpaw

Scarclaw - Brown tabby tom with darker stripes and orange-copper eyes. Battle-scarred body with bad left-eyed vision.

Greyshard - Blue tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes. Slightly flattened face and tail.

Twilightear - Black tom with white front paws, tail tip, belly and chest. Gold eyes.

Icefang - Part albino tom with albino pink eyes.

Frosttail - Part albino tom with grey parts. Blue eyes.

Rosesong - Pale tortoiseshell she-cat with dark green eyes.

Apprentices: Rockpaw - Thick-furred, musky brown tom with pale orange eyes (part Somali).

Skunkpaw - Black-and-white tom with hazel eyes.

Treepaw - Light brown tabby she-cat with darker stripes. Yellow eyes.

Blossompaw - Fluffy white she-cat with pale fawn tinged back and darker fawn patches. Copper eyes. Mute.

Queens: Snowtail - Part albino she-cat with pale grey stripes on tail. Albino blue eyes.

Silverwhisker - Blue she-cat with silver streaks and minty-green eyes.

Morningheart - Flame-coloured she-cat with a black chest. Green eyes.

Tall-leaf - Long-legged she-cat with black fur and pale copper eyes. White muzzle, chest and patch on back.

Elders: Halfheart - Small albino she-cat with right eye scarred, right ear shredded, half of tail missing, broken jaw and scarred body. Albino blue eyes.

Blackeye - Black tom with a white tail tip and patch over left eye. Copper eyes.

Redsplodge - Red tortoiseshell she-cat with white patches. Scar over muzzle, nose and right eye. Greenish-amber eyes.

Dapplewind - Albino tom with medium-length, fluffy fur. Blind albino pink eyes.

Fallenbranch - Fawn tabby she-cat with green eyes. Retired early due to crippled, back, left leg.

Kits: Snowtail's and Wolflungs':

Littlekit - Small, white tabby tom with pale grey stripes and muzzle.

Pale yellow eyes.

Briarkit - Part albino she-cat with pale grey, front, left leg. Albino pink eyes.

SunClan

Leader: Redstar - Dark ginger tabby tom with very dark stripes. Green eyes.

Deputy: Duststorm - Pale, musky brown tabby tom with dark brown stripes. Amber eyes.

Medicine Cat: Maplefrost - Ginger she-cat with white dappled back of body. Blue eyes.

Warriors: Squirreldawn - Ginger tortoiseshell she-cat with emerald green eyes.

Apprentice - Daisypaw

Tigerlily - Orange tabby she-cat with brownish spots. Yellow eyes. Formerly known as 'Lily of Tiger'.

Apprentice - Mudpaw

Smallflame - Small golden tabby tom with reddish stripes and ears. Bright green eyes.

Pumpkinblaze - Mostly ginger, calcio tom with leafy green eyes. Furry mane.

Apprentice - Applepaw

Crookedspirit - Grumpy, black-and-white tom with blue eyes. Long, half-broken neck.

Apprentice - Dandelionpaw

Barkdust - Brown tom with black, white and light brown smears. Amber eyes.

Fawnberry - Light brown tabby she-cat with brown stripes, fore-

head and dappled back. Black muzzle. Dark green eyes.

Birchblaze - White tabby tom with grey stripes and face. Green eyes. Scarred paws.

Apprentice - Brackenpaw

Snowblossom - White she-cat with round, black patches. Blue eyes.

Swiftrose - Tortoiseshell she-cat with ginger and brown patches. Green eyes.

Wrenfeather - Light brown tom with brown patches and stripes. Brown eyes.

Apprentices: Dandelionpaw - Yellow tabby she-cat with orange spots. Yellow eyes.

Applepaw - Calico tom with dark ginger patches. Green eyes.

Daisypaw - Black-and-white she-cat. Green eyes.

Mudpaw - Brown tabby with a darker face, ears, tail-tip and short stripes. Hazel eyes.

Brackenpaw - Golden tabby tom with orange stripes, ears and mane around neck. Green eyes.

Queens: Blueleaf - Blue she-cat with a silver muzzle. Green eyes.

Ivycloud - White she-cat with grey tabby patches. Green eyes.

Brindlewhisker - Brindle-coloured, tortoiseshell she-cat. Yellow eyes.

Elders: Wetthroat - Sleek, black-and-white tom with a long neck and blue eyes.

Stumpyfoot - Brown tabby tom with darker paws and stripes, Amber eyes. Front, left leg is a stump.

One-ear - Calico she-cat with green eyes. Right ear shredded.

Tornherb - Golden tabby tom with ginger stripes. Yellow eyes. Shredded tail, former medicine cat.

Kits: Blueleaf's and Wrenfeather's:

Marshkit - Brown tom with darker paws and stripes. Brown eyes.

Mistykit - Blue she-cat with a silver muzzle. Green eyes. Blind in right eye.

Brindlewhisker's and Barkdust's:

Buzzardkit - Brindle-coloured, tortoiseshell she-cat. Amber eyes. Large, furry tail.

LeafClan

Leader: Pheasantstar - Tortoiseshell she-cat with an impressive tail. Green eyes.

Deputy: Ottertail - Dark brown tom with a glossy coat. Deep blue eyes. Scar across nose.

Medicine Cat: Nettlesplash - Grey tabby tom with distinctive, swirling stripes. Blue eyes.

Apprentice - Poppyspark - Ginger tabby she-cat with a paler belly. Amber eyes.

Warriors: Weedwhisker - Grey tabby tom with pointy stripes. Pale green eyes.

Muskygrass - Dark, musky brown she-cat with light brown belly, paws, muzzle and chest. Green eyes. Scarred muzzle.

Branchbelly - Brown she-cat with paler belly. Bright green eyes.

Silvershine - Silver she-cat with tabby streaks and blue eyes.

Lionstripe - Golden tabby tom. Orange eyes.

Cloudfang - Grey tabby tom with large white patches. Amber eyes.

Skypelt - Solid pale grey tom with white patches. Dark blue eyes.

Oakstep - Deep brown tom with shiny fur. Copper eyes.

Eaglefeather - Brown tabby tom with amber eyes.

Mudnose - Brown tabby tom with black stripes. Paler muzzle and belly. Green eyes.

Silentbird - Sleek brown she-cat with deep blue eyes.

Breezewhistle - Brown tom with paler belly and paws. Bright green eyes.

Queens: Cherrytwig - Tortoiseshell she-cat with a bushy, red tail. Amber eyes.

Snoweye - White she-cat with pale grey patches. Pale blue eyes.

Ashstripe - Grey tabby she-cat with dark grey stripes, paws and tail. Emerald green eyes.

Elders: Brackenfurl - Golden tabby tom with orange eyes.

Fernwhisker - Grey tabby she-cat with white patches. Blue eyes.

Kits: Cherrytwig's and Lionstripe's:

Rosekit - Tortoiseshell she-cat with a bushy, red tail. Green eyes.

Sandkit - Golden tabby tom with orange eyes.

Snoweye's and Oakstep's:

Cedarkit - Glossy-furred, brown she-cat with copper eyes.
Windkit - White tom with grey patches. Copper eyes.

Patchkit - White tom with brown patches. Blue eyes.

LakeClan

Leader: Flowingstar - Pale blue tabby she-cat with dark blue stripes. Blue eyes.

Deputy: Jaguarface - Dark brown tom with black, jaguar-like markings. Dark green eyes.

Apprentice - Oakpaw

Medicine Cat: Rainfeather - Blue she-cat with slightly darker spots and a tuft of fur on top of her head. Feathered ears. Blue-green eyes.

Warriors: Thornheart - Pale ginger tom with darker, jaguar-like markings. Green eyes.

Apprentice - Hopepaw

Lionwhisper - Golden tabby tom with a furry muzzle. Orange eyes.

Cherrytail - Spiky-furred, ginger she-cat. darker ears, paws and tail. Green eyes.

Apprentice - Lilypaw

Badgerclaw - Black-and-white tom with long claws. Hazel eyes.

Apprentice - Jaypaw

Ravenstorm - Black tom with dusty brown stripes. Green eyes. Scar over eyes.

Waterpelt - Pale blue she-cat with darker blue ears and spots. Icy blue eyes.

Apprentice - Nettlepaw

Willowstream - Grey she-cat with dark grey, jaguar-like markings. Green eyes.

Clearmind - Solid grey tom with curly fur. Amber eyes.

Windfoot - Light grey tabby tom with black stripes, paws and tail. Blue-green eyes.

Goldwish - Golden she-cat with darker paws, ears and tail. Green eyes.

Apprentices: Hopepaw - White she-cat with black, swirly markings. Amber eyes.

Lilypaw - White she-cat with black, lily-shaped patches. Orange eyes.

Jaypaw - Blue tabby she-cat with dark blue stripes, paws and chest. Blue-green eyes.

Nettlepaw - Spiky-furred, ginger tom with darker tail. Dark green eyes.

Oakpaw - Brown tabby tom with dark stripes. Ginger-tinged fur. Blue-green eyes.

Queens: Swanspark - White she-cat with blue eyes.

Pearlstripe - White she-cat with pale blue tabby stripes. Pale copper eyes.

Elders: Tigerspot - Pale ginger tom with reddish, jaguar-like markings. Pale green eyes.

Tall-lily - Long-limbed and tailed, blue tabby she-cat with dark blue, thick stripes. Copper eyes.

Rabbitleap - Grey tabby tom with orange eyes.

Twotail - Golden she-cat with darker tail, which is split in two (wound). Green eyes. Former medicine cat. Oldest cat of all the Clans.

Kits: Swanspark's and Badgerclaw's:

Goosekit - White-and-grey flecked she-cat. Blue eyes.

Skykit - White tom with black patches. Amber eyes.

Heronkit - White-and-grey tom with a thick coat. Hazel eyes.

NightClan

Leader: Deadstar - Black tom with white paws, ears and tail. Twisted

tail and right ear. One blue eye, one orange eye.

Deputy: Sparrowfur - Brown tabby she-cat with darker stripes, ears, chest and belly. Amber eyes.

Apprentice - Blackpaw

Medicine Cat: Hawkscreech - Thick-furred, golden tabby tom with dark stripes. Ice blue eyes.

Warriors: Duskroar - Black tom with a long neck. One blue eye, one amber eye.

Apprentice - Wasppaw

Streamingmist - Blue tabby she-cat with long legs. A jagged scar over half of her face. Blue eyes.

Apprentice - Antpaw

Bramblepebble - Grey tabby tom with blue eyes.

Darkfire - Grey-black tom. Bright amber eyes.

Adderfang - Golden she-cat with diamond-shaped stripes. Long teeth. Amber eyes.

Apprentice - Runningpaw

Spottedsky - Tortoiseshell she-cat with white patches. Sun-yellow eyes.

Lynxfall - Dark tortoiseshell tom. Orange eyes.

Apprentice - Marigoldpaw

Crackedclaw - Black tom with long, twisted claws. Green eyes.

Apprentice - Whirlingpaw

Roughtail - Pale brown tabby tom with pointed stripes. Amber eyes.

Brokensmoke - Grey she-cat with blue tinged fur. Green eyes. Tail

snapped in half.

Apprentices: Blackpaw - Dark grey tom. Amber eyes.

Runningpaw - Long-legged, grey tortoiseshell she-cat. Blue eyes.

Marigoldpaw - Red tortoiseshell she-cat. Orange eyes.

Antpaw - Small, calico tom. Pale amber eyes.

Wasppaw - Cream-coloured she-cat. Yellow eyes.

Queens: Grasstalon - Light brown tabby she-cat with brown stripes. Green eyes.

Longpelt - Long-furred, grey-tortoiseshell she-cat with white paws. Amber eyes.

Beestripe - Cream-coloured she-cat. Yellow eyes.

Elders: Shadowstalker - Black tom. Amber eyes.

Poppystone - Tortoiseshell she-cat. Sun-yellow eyes.

Twistedjaw - Grey tom with black ears, paws and patches. One blue eye, one orange eye. Broken jaw.

Kits: Longpelt's and Duskroar's:

Dawnkit - Grey tom with deep amber eyes.

Beestripe's and Roughtail's:

Lionkit - Pale ginger tabby tom. Amber eyes.

Honeykit - Creamy she-cat with golden-orange streaks. Yellow eyes.

Grasstalon's and Deadstar's:

Ashkit - Black-and-grey tom. Blue eyes.

Dustykit - Light brown tabby she-cat. Green eyes

Other Animals:

Darkness of Leaf (Dark) - Dark tortoiseshell she-cat with ginger, cream-coloured and white patches. Blue eyes.

Dripping of Blood (Drip) - Well-muscled, grey tabby tom with dark brown and ginger stripes, swirls and patches. Haze; eyes.

Crow of Moonlight (Crow) - Black-and-white, mask-and-mantle tom. One amber eye, one blue eye.

Shadowmist - Black she-cat with grey splotches. Yellow eyes. Formerly of NightClan, exiled. Battle-scarred.

Map - Cat View

[image] [image] [image]

Cat View of the New Forest:

P.S. the stream in AirClan territory should go through the AirClan camp mountain. I drew it there by accident.

Map - Twoleg View

[image] [image]

Twoleg view of the New Forest:

Prologue

[image]

Night lay on the forest like a thick black cover of leaves. Shadows sat still underneath trees, while the wind quietly rustled the uppermost branches. Nothing stirred, not even a mouse. The Green-Leaf heat still bored down through the night, driving prey deep into their underground burrows.

North of the Twoleg Farm, there was a clearing surrounded in pine trees. The clearing was empty of everything, except a large rock in the Eastern part of it. Suddenly, a shadow flitted between the trees behind the rock. It was unseen by anything, flying swiftly over the cracked ground. On the other side of the clearing, a much smaller shape leaped out of the shadows. It ran full-pelt across the ground and stopped a fox-length from the rock.

As the moon filtered over a patch of thin clouds, the she-cat was revealed clearly. Her black fur sploshed with red gave her tortoiseshell pelt an illusion of being covered in blood. The she-cat's orange eyes were glazed with exhaustion and fear.

"Phew..." the she-cat gasped quietly, trembling on tired legs, "Thank StarClan I got out of there...!"

As the tortoiseshell tried to catch her breath, the first shadowy figure leaped onto the rock. In one bound, they mounted the grey lump and snarled down at the she-cat.

"An eavesdropper?!" they asked, grinning maliciously.

Eyes narrowed to slits; the tortoiseshell looked up. The moon sparkled another ray of silver light into the clearing. Ginger, cream, and white patches dappled the brown pelt of the new arrival. Her tortoiseshell fur looked more like autumn leaves than the dark pelt of the first she-cat. Blue eyes shone coldly in the white light.

"Well, that's rude!" the second cat mewed sinisterly, with mock

innocence, "Never mind, so what can I call you?"

After a short pause, the brown she-cat replied to her own question, "Oh! What about... dead apprentice...?"

Trying to look fierce, but failing, the red she-cat growled in terror, "No, please, I won't tell anyone!"

She stared imploringly up at the other cat, claws scraping the hard earth.

With a twitch of amused whiskers, the brown she-cat replied, "Oh, really?"

Backing away slowly, the red she-cat nodded fervently, "Yes, I- who *could* I tell?"

The brown she-cat stared up at the moon, apparently lost in thought.
"I *would* consider letting you live..."

Sighing, the red cat closed her eyes in thanks, "Thank yo-"

"But..." the sing-song voice jerked the red cat back to reality, "I seem to like the taste of *prey* too much... and no-one, NO-ONE, is to know about the plan."

Shaking more violently than before, the red cat shouted at the second cat, "No, please! I beg you! Don't!"

"SILENCE!" the harsh, loud mew did just that - the red she-cat fell silent, except for her hoarse panting, "Say your prayers to those little ancestors of yours."

The red she-cat didn't try to hide her fear now. She turned sharply from where she crouched, and whipped round to run away, "PLEASE! NO!"

Before she had moved a kit-step, the ginger cat launched herself off the rock. Muscles bulging, claws unsheathed, a lump of brown tortoiseshell fur flattened the red cat. Screeching, the red she-cat's throat was pierced with four long, deep claw-marks. Keeping her

left paw firmly of the red cat's neck, the ginger cat grinned with spite.

"Any last words - what was it - Marigoldpaw?"

Marigoldpaw spluttered, foam forming at the corners at her mouth. Already thinking that victory was hers, the other she-cat loosened her grip. That was a mistake.

Seizing any strand of hope, Marigoldpaw lashed out. She hit the other she-cat in the jaw, sending it upwards. The brown she-cat lurched back, blood seeping from her mouth. She stumbled a rabbit-hop away, grunting in pain. Marigoldpaw struggled to her paws. She crouched down defensively, facing the brown she-cat bravely. Now that there wasn't the other cat's paw blocking it's flow, blood oozed more thickly through Marigoldpaw's wounds. It soaked the fur all around her throat and splattered the dusty ground.

However, Marigoldpaw still managed to croak out some courageous words.
"They'll... find... out..." red foamed bubbled at the base of her mouth.

Recovering from the blow, the she-cat swiped her jaw with her paw, the same one covered in Marigoldpaw's blood. She stood up straight and shook her head. "Maybe one-day. Yes, definitely one-day." She confirmed without hesitating.

Pain lashed through Marigoldpaw, like a horde of adders, all sinking their fangs into her. She closed her eyes with anguish. Opening one, she rasped, "They'll... Rrgh... Know... StarClan... Will tell... Them... That you-"

She never finished the sentence.

Before Marigoldpaw could, the brown she-cat flung out a paw, claws pulled out. The force of the blow flung Marigoldpaw at the rock. In a heartbeat, the brown cat vaulted onto Marigoldpaw, holding her head to the stone wall by a blood-soaked, sheathed paw. Yowling in agony, the breath was knocked out of Marigoldpaw, who now had four, long claw marks across her face.

The other cat was pressing her paw more strongly to Marigoldpaw's throat by the second, cutting off the passage of air. Lips turning blue and blood trickling into her eyes, Marigoldpaw started struggling. She clawed at every part of the brown cat's leg she could reach, tearing the fur out in clumps and ripping at the flesh.

"That's enough, *dear* Marigold." The orange she-cat whispered menacingly, "Now..."

Blood dribbling from the brown cat's mouth, she mewed quietly, "DIE."

"PLE-" Marigoldpaw's desperate cry was cut off by a flash of yellowing claws.

"Hrgh! Ugh..."

Her bright orange eyes glazed, and turned to two blank, staring pieces of amber, glistening in the moonlight. The brown she-cat lifted her paw from her victim's throat, and she stood to the side. Marigoldpaw's body slid down the rock-face and lay. A shining patch of blood coated the rock, where it had hit Marigoldpaw's head. Small but gushing strongly, a pool of crimson liquid slithered around Marigoldpaw's head, from her throat, her mouth, the back of her head.

Taciturnly, the brown she-cat stared at the motionless tortoiseshell heap. A twig snapping brought the she-cat's attention. Another cat was creeping through the empty, baked forest. Its shadowy form appeared between two large pine trunks, exactly where Marigoldpaw had shown up.

"Hey, Dark, did you get her?" a large, muscular grey tabby tom mewed, stepping into the light.

His pelt was splashed with more colour than any other tabby. Its base was grey with darker lines, but on top of that, was a layer of ginger stripes and swirls. A sheet of fur roughly covered that, in brown patches and streaks. He had smouldering hazel-coloured eyes, which gleamed like dew on leaves at dawn. His paws were a pale brown, and his nose was rimmed with dark copper.

At his sight, Dark's whole demeanour changed. The threatening, blood-thirsty monster, turned into an adoring, gentle she-cat, who would do anything to please this new entry.

"Drip?" Dark smiled widely, and added distractedly, "Oh, I got her."

Not noticing Dark's immediate change of attitude, Drip answered, "Great!"

His green-brown gaze fell on the unstirring, black body a few tail-lengths from him. A genuinely happy smile danced across his face.

"Hurry up, then. 'Whitey' says those AirClan cats will be waking up anytime now..." Drip nodded in the general direction of the mountains, many, many tree-lengths from the clearing. "...And Crow's had a marvellous idea."

Dark seemed not to have heard his words, but she mewed cheerily, "Alright, I'm coming." She limped towards Drip, her left leg stiff from all the scratches and her jaw aching, still dripping blood. Drip looked her up and down, eyeing her carmine-soaked fur.

"Looks like she fought *pretty* hard. You'll need some time to clean those wounds." Drip commented slyly.

Dark stopped listening after the word 'pretty', *Pretty! Me? Oh, Drip!* she thought, relishing the 'idea' that Drip thought she looked nice.

"Here, I'll help."

"Huh-"

Drip moved slowly towards Dark. When they were no more than a mouse-tail apart, he licked her cheek, cleaning off some of the blood. Dark felt herself grow hot, her ears burned, and her pads grew damp.

"Th-thanks..." she murmured, not looking at Drip.

"That's OK." Drip licked his paw and drew it over his ear. He didn't seem to realise how much of Dark's hidden spirit he had awoken. He added blandly, "Come on then, we haven't got all night."

The colourful tom padded off around the rock. He flung Marigoldpaw's body and few mouse-lengths with his paw, and, sneering, headed into the trees. Drip looked back, gesturing with his tail to Dark. She raced after him, looking at her paws. As she passed Marigoldpaw's battered body, laying belly down on the ground, Dark's old self came back to life. She straightened her back, licked the oozing blood from her leg and smiled nastily. Paws thumping on the hard-packed earth, Dark and Drip flung themselves into the darkness of the pines.

Shining very brightly for a single heartbeat, the stars strewn across the inky black sky glittered welcomingly. The forest went quiet again. A solitary, thick cloud covered the half-moon for a few moments. In that period of time, shadows erupted from every corner. Now looking quite small, the clearing was turned a dark grey. The only light came from the pearly stars and a translucent figure standing over Marigoldpaw's body. The figure gave off a faint silvery light and her dark tortoiseshell fur was now pale.

Marigoldpaw's spirit stared sadly at, what once was, her body. It was quite unharmed, except for her head. Her dead face was empty of feeling, scarred with four long marks, and the back of her head was soaked with scarlet blood. Her mouth lolled open, red-tinged foam still bubbling gently inside. And her throat was shredded. Fur hung from thin strands, while blood streamed slowly from the deep cuts. Bare flesh covered most of the area that wasn't flooded with shining liquid. Marigoldpaw's sprit sighed heavily and turned.

Two small cats, the size of kits, were sitting side-by-side, a fox-length behind Marigoldpaw. They were both toms. One was light brown with darker paws, ears, tail, and face, with beautiful blue eyes. The other tom was a bit smaller, but his extremely fluffy fur made him as big as his companion. He had brown tabby fur, the stripes were almost invisible against it; his chin, chest and belly were a snowy white, while his eyes shone a deep amber. Both of their pelts were glittering with stars and a golden glow shimmered their bodies. Marigoldpaw trotted up to them their eyes brimming with sadness. The light brown kit waved his tail. The two toms rose to their paws and padded of towards the darkness, Marigoldpaw's spirit following.

Word Count: 1844

Chapter 1

[image]

Rock-kit padded confidently through the pine forest. His paws made no sound on the needle-strewn ground. One the other paw, his friend and den-mate, Skunk-kit, trotted noisily, his nervousness making him clumsy. Rock-kit smelt the rich, earthy fragrance of the woods; overlain with the fresher scents of a patrol they had just missed. Moments ago, he and Skunk-kit had hidden in a hollow pine trunk, to escape from a sunhigh patrol, consisting of Greyshard, Wolflungs and Mousefoot. Now, they continued through the forest, Rock-kit leading Skunk-kit.

"Are we there, yet?" Skunk-kit panted, running to catch up.

Rock-kit growled bad-temperedly and whipped back to face Skunk-kit, "I told you it was a long way to go!"

Skunk-kit backed away a few mouse-lengths and muttered, "Yes, I know, but-"

"If you're tired, go back to camp, like a good kit!" Rock-kit cut Skunk-kit off. He swished around and ran ahead, ignoring Skunk-kit's mews of protest. He had had enough of Skunk-kit's whining.

"No, I-I want to come!" Skunk-kit meowed anxiously. He bounded after Rock-kit.

"Fine, but be quiet, or we'll be seen. Your blabbering would scare off a deaf badger sleeping in the Twolegplace!" Rock-kit flicked his tail ungenerously, grinning at Skunk-kit.

"Hey!" Skunk-kit stopped in his tracks and stared at Rock-kit.

"I'm kidding! But, no, *do* be quiet." Rock-kit ordered, used to telling Skunk-kit what to do.

For a few more minutes, the two kits travelled in silence. Rock-kit

glanced back every other heartbeat to see if Skunk-kit was still following. Every time, he was. The musky brown tom kit weaved around trees and at one point leaped over a fallen pine. On the other side, Rock-kit peered back, expecting to see the black-and-white pelt of his friend, but he only saw the crumbled trunk. Sighing, Rock-kit leaped onto the top of the tree again. Skunk-kit was struggling to get a paw-hold on the dry branches. Rock-kit grabbed Skunk-kit's scruff and heaved him up the branches. On the uppermost bough, Skunk-kit looked around them and shivered. Rock-kit let go and looked at him sternly.

Through the thick, dark green foliage, Rock-kit could see the fence of the Twoleg farm, long, pale brown jumbles of flat, dusty logs. Next to him, Skunk-kit shuddered again, hazel eyes narrowing. Rock-kit looked at him with questioning, pale orange eyes.

"If any-one spots us so close to the edge of our territory, without supervision, we are **so** in trouble!" Skunk-kit explained, glancing around them.

"What are you?" Rock-kit asked toughly, "A mouse?"

"No," Skunk-kit hissed back quietly.

Rock-kit jumped onto the dusty ground. Above the tall pine trees, the smouldering, Green-Leaf Sun reached down through the branches. By the time the trees started to thin out and become more widely-spaced, Rock-kit's back was burning. His Leaf-Bare thick fur was useless in weather like this, it felt as if all the heat in the forest was out to get him.

They were coming close to a clearing in the pines. Rock-kit turned around to tell Skunk-kit. Paws barely leaving the ground, Skunk-kit had fallen behind almost a whole tree-length. Head down, he was panting and huffing.

"C'mon, we're almost there!" Rock-kit called to Skunk-kit. Pads sweating, Rock-kit ran back to Skunk-kit and butted him in his hindquarters. Annoyance pricked Rock-kit's fur, as he did so.

"OK..." Skunk-kit muttered, pulling his paws.

Quite soon, the two kits came to the outskirts of the clearing. Rock-kit wove around a small, deep-set stone and pushed aside a low-hanging branch. Skunk-kit gasped.

A dusty clearing spread out in front of them. Cracked earth made up the ground, while the Sun bored down, directly over the middle. In a pool of bright sunlight amidst tall pine shadows, a black tortoiseshell body lay, unnaturally still. A tail-length away, on the opposite side of the clearing, a giant rock, about a fox-length high, stood, its grey surface, splintered by the heat. All around the clearing, there was an almost perfect circle of towering pines. Their usually smooth, deep brown branches with vibrant, dark green needles were now shrunken and oak-coloured with shrivelled, musky green barbs. Rock-kit trotted on confidently, as if he knew every whisker-width of the place. Which, to be honest, he did. He padded up to the black-and-red body and looked down at it. Rock-kit could barley contain the feelings of excitement and anticipation that pulsed out of him.

He turned back to Skunk-kit and mewed loudly, "There we go. A dead body."

Skunk-kit plodded hesitantly towards him. He joined Rock-kit and looked down at it.

Well?!, Rock-kit thought irritably, *I risk my apprenticeship bringing you here and you barely look at it!* Rock-kit nudged Skunk-kit and gestured to the back of the body. It was laying face down in the dust, its head turned on the other side so that they couldn't see it. The brown tom kit prodded Skunk-kit with a paw. He looked at his black-and-white friend, who was trying not to take the whole of the body into view. Swishing his tail, Rock-kit jumped over the body and landed precisely on the other side. Skunk-kit followed, but when his front paws touched the ground, they slipped.

Rock-kit stifled a laugh. The rest of Skunk-kit's body flipped over his head. His black paws had touched down onto a pool of blood. He leaped up quickly, as his white back was turned to crimson and half-dried blood soaked it. Grimacing, Skunk-kit rolled onto his back to wipe the blood on the ground.

After a short pause, where Rock-kit's eyes gleamed with playful malice, Skunk-kit twitched his ears and mewed, "Wow... What happened to her?"

A young she-cat's face stared blankly up at them. Four long scratches were marked clearly across her face. Glistening orange eyes filled her twisted expression, null and void. The little that showed of her neck was covered in blood and the back of her head was coated in a drying, carmine-coloured sheen. Fur and dry, darkened blood scattered the ground all around her.

Scoffing, Rock-kit answered, flicking his head back to look at Skunk-kit, "How in all of StarClan would *I* know *that*?" Rock-kit looked at Skunk-kit, expecting him to do a noncommittal grunt or something of the like, but the small kit answered defiantly.

"Well, it was you who found her." Skunk-kit stared at the lifeless form of the she-cat.

Pretending to be furious, fluffing up his fur, Rock-kit growled, "Are you accusing me of killing her?"

Skunk-kit backed away, he flattened his ears and stammered, "I'm-no... I-"

Smoothening his thick fur, Rock-kit laughed good-naturedly, "I'm joking! I'm joking, mousebrain." Rock-kit veered around the dead body, brushing against Skunk-kit as he went. "C'mon. We should get back before anyone notices we're gone."

Rock-kit trotted up to the line of trees, stopping a couple of rabbit-hops away from the nearest pine. Skunk-kit followed him shortly.

Jokingly, Skunk-kit meowed to Rock-kit, "Yeah. If we miss our apprentice ceremony, Tall-Leaf will kill me." He glanced at Rock-kit and added, "And Owlstar would probably kill you."

Rock-kit shuddered at the tom kit's words but threw a comeback over his shoulder, "She would have to dig me up first, because Blossomkit would have gotten to me before." He let his thoughts wander to camp. Blossomkit's pretty fawn-tinged white pelt would

be gathering dust in the medicine cat den at the moment, as usual around midday. His other sister, Treekit, would probably be ordering about the younger warriors or the elders, already 'getting used to' her soon-to-be higher rank. Her brown tabby pelt was only a few shades lighter than their father's, Scarclaw, with very similar stripes. Blossomkit had their mother's pelt, fawn-and-white, while Rock-kit thought that the only way *he* was similar to his family, was that he was brown. Rock-kit's dust-coloured, thick, pale brown fur was so very different from Scarclaw's or Owlstar's short fur. They sometimes said that he looked exactly like Scarclaw's father, Gorsetail, but Rock-kit never believed them.

Skunk-kit interrupted his thoughts, laughing nervously and muttering "Yeah..."

Rock-kit looked around the clearing and made to stare up at the sky. A flash of fur on the opposite line of trees made him jump slightly. A small but thick patch of ferns grew right underneath a spindly pine tree. Through a gap in the ferns, Rock-kit could make out brown fur, not musky-brown like his, with splotches of ginger. Two, glittering blue eyes met his. They disappeared with no more than a single swish of a fern. The brown tom sniffed the air and froze. Rock-kit fluffed out his musky fur, shaking off the dust. And shaking off a sneaking suspicion.

That scent that cat left... he thought, staring into the patch of ferns, *It's just like what I smelt around the dead she-cat, when a found her, three days ago...*

Shaking his head, Rock-kit turned around and trotted towards the rock and the low-hanging branches. "Let's go. It's past sunhigh and the ceremony is-" As the two tom kits steered around the rock, they froze on the other side. A pair of familiar pelts was coming closer.

"Oh, no...!" Skunk-kit half whispered; half cried.

Bright yellow eyes fixed on the pair of kits, and a fawn-and-white she-cat bounded to them, glowering from only two kit-steps away. "WHAT is going on here?!" she demanded.

Her companion, a brown tabby tom with a horribly scarred pelt

sprang up to them. He stopped on the fawn she-cat's left and turned his head towards hers. Doing so, Rock-kit could see his left eye, which still scared him. It was orange in colour with coppery tinges around the edges. It was everything like a normal eye, except for the fact, that the slit was pulled vertically from the bottom of the eye to the top. An almost perfect line of a scar stretched halfway up his face, going right across his eye.

"Owlstar, sweetie, what's wrong-?" the brown tabby started to ask, in an unusually gentle voice, before noticing the two kits and growling. "Rock-kit! Skunk-kit! What are you doing here?!"

Skunk-kit looked at his paws, while Rock-kit faced his parents bravely. After a heartbeat, he cringed and stared at the ground. "Um... We were-"

Skunk-kit leaned towards Rock-kit and breathed into his ear, "We are **so** in trouble..."

Word Count: 1862

I cut this chapter up into 3 separate parts. Just so you know why it's suddenly shorter.

Chapter 2

[image]

No, this isn't technically an update.
I'm splitting the chapters so it's easier to read, as suggested by multipl e people ^^

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"So I was speaking to my senior warriors, and we decided to let you become apprentices as normal. Your sisters would have been most disappointed. As it's not their fault, why 'punish' them. And as for you, Skunk-kit, I get the feeling that you were pulled along onto this 'adventure'. Again, it's not your fault." Owlstar finished with a pointed looked at Rock-kit.

Yeah! Blame me for everything, as usual. Don't mind my *feelings. Trod all over my tail, see if I respect you even more!* Rock-kit thought bitterly but managed to let out a half-hearted "Yes!"

Skunk-kit bowed his head and sighed loudly, "Oh, thank you, Owlstar!"

They were sitting just outside Owlstar's den, the HighMound, inside AirClan camp. Four cats padded out of the den behind her, the senior warriors of AirClan. Foxnose, the ginger deputy, glanced thoughtfully at the two kits. Wolflungs, a white tabby tom, smiled warmly at them. Then came Mousefoot, a a thickset grey tabby, who pursed his lips and looked as if he was holding back a mean comment. Finally, Scarclaw trotted out of the hollow mound of earth, pushing against the wall of ivy that hid the inside from view. His scars stood black against his dark fur in the shadows of the giant cave. Scarclaw nodded at the two kits, looking at Rock-kit with a half-hidden smile.

When they had gone, Owlstar continued. "However! Your punishments must be most severe! I can't make exceptions for you, just because you're my son." With the last sentence, Owlstar looked
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at Rock-kit and spoke to him alone.

Fury rose in Rock-kit's throat like bile, *he* was getting blamed for everything again. He lashed his tail at Owlstar and roared boldly, "But we-"

Owlstar cut him off with a flick of her thick, fawn tail. "Rock-kit, you will be on elder duties for two moons." She mewed half angrily, not meeting Rock-kit's eyes.

He felt the bubble of rage in his throat pop. Whipping his long, thin tail in the air, Rock-kit growled at Owlstar, "WHAT?! But I- we- I-"

His leader bared her teeth, making Rock-kit's anger be momentarily replaced by fear and anxiety. "Silence! Skunk-kit." She turned to the shivering, black-and-white tom, who flattened his ears. "You will look after the younger kits *and* see to the queens' needs."

"H-how long?" Skunk-kit muttered.

"The same amount of time as Rock-kit - two moons." She replied briskly.

Rock-kit sneered indirectly at Owlstar, then whipped his head around to insult her choice to Skunk-kit, "Ha! You got the easy job! Caring for kits. How boring is that? Nothing compared to those stinky furballs in the elders' cave!" Rock-kit couldn't help himself. He stared defiantly at Owlstar as she surveyed him with emotionless eyes.

"Yeah..." chuckled Skunk-kit weakly, before falling silent as Owlstar turned her gaze to him.

"May I remind you, that four of those kits are your kin. They are barely half a day old, and the fact that you find it *boring* to look after them, is highly disrespectful. I expect- Actually, considering your behaviour recently, I don't know what to expect of you." Owlstar cast half a glance around the den, at the bramble bush nursery. "I am very disappointed with both of you. I wouldn't have thought that *my* kit, would be the one to miss his apprentice ceremony!"

What?! I didn't even miss it! And Skunk-kit 'missed' it as well! Rock-kit growled in his head. *Why do you treat me like a badger covered in fox-dung? What did I ever do to you?*

"Sorry," Skunk-kit mewed quietly.

Owlstar looked expectantly at Rock-kit before whipping her tail and announcing, "Sorry is right. I hope the two of you understand the severity of your actions!" the fawn she-cat stared at them, waiting for an answer.

Shuffling his paws, Rock-kit mewed disgruntledly, "Yeah, sorry Owlstar."

Skunk-kit meowed softly, "Yes, Owlstar, sorry."

She narrowed her hawk-like eyes, apparently doubting Rock-kit's words. Owlstar nodded stiffly, "Good, now get ready for your ceremony." She stalked off towards the nursery, waving her tail irritably.

After a few moments, Rock-kit turned to Skunk-kit and sighed jokingly, "I was sure our ceremony was going to be cancelled and postponed!"

Black-and-white fur still bristling, Skunk-kit smiled weakly and nodded, "Yeah. I thought we were done for."

"Skunk-kit!"

"Oh, fox dung!" he cursed.

Apparently, you're *still are.* Rock-kit thought gleefully.

A sleek black-and-white she-cat strode over to them from the nursery, her belly plump with kits. She had a well-groomed black pelt with a white muzzle, chest, and patch on her back. Her eyes were a pale copper colour, like dry oak leaves in Autumn. A long, thin, black tail flew out from behind her. The young queen marched up to Skunk-kit and tried to put on an angry voice. "What has been happening? Owlstar told me all about your little kerfuffle! How dare you go out of camp without me knowing? I was worried sick!"

Skunk-kit looked at his paws and mewed apologetically, "I-I'm s-s-sorry, T-T-Tall-L-Leaf."

Tall-Leaf bit her lip and barely managed to put on a furious face, "You should have seen how disappointed your father was! It was hard enough for him, trying to find his only son before he missed his apprentice ceremony. Then, it turns out you ran away to StarClan knows where, on the outskirts of our territory!" Her breath was coming in short and shallow gasps. Rock-kit tried to edge away unseen, but Tall-Leaf started again, eyeing him with half-concealed fury. "What if you got lost on another Clan's land? What if a fox or badger got to you? I hope Owlstar is punishing you properly!"

"Y-yes. Sh-she did..." Skunk-kit muttered,. Casting a glance at Rock-kit, he whispered, "Only son?" Rock-kit looked at Tall-Leaf's giant belly and started to sneak back again.

Grabbing Skunk-kit's scruff, Tall-Leaf pulled him close and sighed, "Good! Come here - I need to get you cleaned up before the ceremony. Look at the state of your fur!"

As she started licking Skunk-kit, Rock-kit creeped away, around HighMound and towards the nursery. He glanced back at Skunk-kit, who was struggling to free himself from Tall-Leaf's grip. Smugness but resentment filled Rock-kit at the same time. Thank goodness his mother didn't spoil him like as if he was the most important cat ever. But, it would be nice to get *some* appreciation.

"Rock-kit, there you are!" a voice called quietly but shrilly behind him.

Rock-kit jumped, *Almighty StarClan, Blossomkit! That scared me...* "I thought you were mute..." he turned to see his two sisters running towards him, from the bramble den.

One of them was a white she-cat with a pale fawn tinged back, and small darker fawn patches on top of that. She had copper eyes, the same shade as Scarclaw's. The other one was slightly bigger, but younger than the first, she had a light brown pelt with brown tabby stripes and Owlstar's yellow eyes. The first she-cat was called Blossomkit, Rock-kit's 'mute' sister, and the other was Treekit. They

were both older than him, Blossomkit being the first-born, while Treekit being born afterwards, then, finally, Rock-kit.

"I am!" Blossomkit mewed, in the same soft-but-loud tone.

Treekit waved her tail, and padded up to Rock-kit, "Don't. Where were you? Dad looked **so** angry, and mum was FURIOUS!"

The brown tom flicked his tail, "Ugh! Nothing happened. Me and Skunk-kit just went on an early expedition to explore the territory." This lie didn't make him feel bad, Rock-kit had lied on too many occasions to regret this one. Irritation especially swatted guilt away from his heart.

However, Blossomkit didn't look convinced. On the contrary, understanding flashed in her coppery eyes. "We're not new-borns.... We know you found something interesting... We know you have a secret..." she whispered lightly.

Treekit looked mightily confused, "We do?"

Blossomkit tilted her head, nodding, "Yes?"

Dread and guilt snaked their way up Rock-kit's spine. Had Blossomkit followed him to the dead body? How else would of she known? Or had she been sneaking out too, and found it as well? Fear flooded Rock-kit, *What if she says something? What will I do then?!* He tried not to stammer as he meowed, "Um... I-I don't kn-know what you're talking about!"

"Don't you?" Blossomkit asked softly, narrowing her eyes.

Owlstar doing the same thing moments ago blared in Rock-kit's mind. His mother had stood in the exact position that Blossomkit did now. She had bent her knees the same amount as Blossomkit and stared at Rock-kit with the same fire in her eyes. Had Blossomkit seen that exchange? No. She was inside the nursery. Then how did she know what Owlstar had done, whisker-by-whisker?

"Ugh... No!" Rock-kit shook his head slowly, trying to keep the worry out of his voice.

"What? Never mind. Look - Owlstar's calling the Clan. Let's go!" Treekit mewed excitedly, pointing with her tail at the HighMound.

Owlstar must have exited the nursery without Rock-kit seeing her. She had leaped onto the HighMound and faced the direction the bramble bush, her back to the entrance of the camp. "Let all those old enough to tunnel, gather under the HighMound for a Clan meeting!" she called across the camp.

The camp itself was a Twoleg-made cave inside tallest mountain in the whole forest. Inside, it was extremely dark, except for a few gaps in the rock, where light was allowed to flood in. A long tunnel, starting from the Southern side of camp, went underground, leading to the outside world. At the other end, it was covered in brambles, to hide it from outsiders. A stream ran through the camp, cutting it roughly in half, a large piece of bark formed a bridge halfway across. If someone were to be entering the camp, a yew bush would sit on their left, this was the medicine cat den, the stream started here. On the edge of the medicine den, near the wall of the cave, a cylindric rock perched, cracked halfway through the middle. The medicine cat stored their herbs there and slept inside as well. All around the medicine den, there were mossy nests for sick patients. On the opposite side of the entrance of the tunnel, a small gap in the cave wall led to a smaller cave - the elders' cave. In between the mouth of the tunnel and the elders' cave, the fresh-kill pile was filled with rabbits and even an eagle.

In the middle of the medicine den and the elders' cave, there was the HighMound. It was a pile of dried earth, overgrown with grass and weeds. Facing the tunnel, a hole led to the hollow shell inside, where Owlstar, the leader, slept. Ivy slithered down to from a thick wall in front of the hole. Parallel to the HighMound, there was the nursery, a thickly-woven bramble bush. The stream gnawed into a small hollow, just past the bramble bush, leading outside. A large gorse bush grew out from the wall, where the warriors rested, not far left of the nursery. Between, this and the medicine den a fallen oak tree, which Twolegs most likely put there, was surrounded by a tight ring of rocks. That oak tree was hollow, and an ancient owl hole marked the entrance, where the apprentice's dozed.

Cats started streaming from dens to gather in front of the nursery,

under the HighMound. Foxnose sat in the deputy's place, at the left base of the HighMound. Morningheart settled next to him, her belly swollen with their kits. Tall-Leaf and Skunk-kit padded to the front, sitting solemnly. Flamepelt came to rest near Skunk-kit, anticipation gleaming in his eyes.

Rock-kit rose to his paws and made to trot towards the front. Silverwhisker barged into him, almost knocking him off his paws. She settled at the back of the crowd, only a fox-length from the nursery. Rock-kit sniffed and padded forward, quickly followed but Blossomkit and Treekit.

He heard Twilightear mew, "I heard the older kits are getting apprenticed!"

Then, Rosesong, a newly-made warrior, said happily from beside him, "It'll probably be Owlstar's kits! Oh, she must be so proud!"

Silverwhisker huffed bad-temperedly, glancing at the nursery as she spoke, "Well, I don't care who's kits they are, let it be quick. I don't want to leave *my* kits for too long."

Wolflungs turned from where he sat next to Snowtail, their white pelts merging into one, "I'll have you know that I'm mentoring one of them."

Mousefoot, his brother, meowed protectively, "I'm not, but don't be rude to Silverwhisker! She's had a tough night." He rested next to her, and curled his white-striped, thin grey tail around her fluffy blue one. Silverwhisker purred and flattened her ruffled fur.

Something pushed Rock-kit's hindquarters. Scarclaw was nudging him and his sisters forward, one by one. They quickly passed the rest of the Clan. Icefang and Frosttail sitting side-by-side, undistinguishable only from their eyes and scent. Crystalwing wrapped her blue tail around her paws, from where she sat, opposite Foxnose at the front. Redsplodge and Blackeye chatted quietly together, near the entrance to the elders' cave. Halfheart led Dapplewind towards the side of the crowd, staying near the other elders. Fallenbranch limped over to sit near Twilightear, tucking her stump of a leg under her thick tail.

Rock-kit settled a tail-length from Skunk-kit. Blossomkit and Treekit stayed together next to Scarclaw. When the three kits reached the front of the crowd, Owlstar announced to the awaiting cats, "We are gathered here today, because four kits have reached the age of four moons. Blossomkit, Treekit, Rock-kit and Skunk-kit. Today, they shall become apprentices, and come one step closer to completing the destiny StarClan has set out for them."

Rock-kit noticed, that at these words, Owlstar's gaze rested on Blossomkit, and Blossomkit alone. For a heartbeat, he thought he saw something more than pride there, something like...

Fear...

What's Owlstar so afraid of? Rock-kit thought, as he saw that faint glimmer disappear.

Word Count: 2441
No, this is not an update, not technically. I'm splitting the chapters so it's easier to read.

Chapter 3

[image]

Not an update. I'm splitting chapters again ^^

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"Blossomkit - please step forward." Owlstar nodded at the young she-kit, "StarClan has chosen a different destiny for you. Crystalwing wishes to train you as a medicine cat. Crystalwing - you have shown yourself to be a magnificent medicine cat of great skills. Honeystep was one of the best medicine cats I have ever seen, and you have learned well from her. I hope that you will pass on all of the knowledge of StarClan into this new apprentice."

Owlstar's and Crystalwing's gazes met, a new flicker of emotion passed between them. Rock-kit was the nearest to the front of the crowd, and he thought he was the only one who saw this exchange.

"From this day forward, until you receive your full medicine cat name, you will be known as Blossompaw. At the half-moon, Crystalwing will take you to the MoonRock, to introduce you to StarClan and the other medicine cats." Owlstar finished, smiling widely at Blossompaw.

Crystalwing stepped forward to meet Blossompaw. She bent down to touch noses with the newly-made apprentice. "Welcome to the world of a medicine cat. I'm sure you'll be amazing." the blue she-cat whispered, just loud enough for Rock-kit to hear.

"Thank you," Blossompaw murmured politely, her voice edged with happiness.

The two she-cats stepped back to where the medicine cat had been sitting. Blossompaw gazed up at Crystalwing with awe and excitement.

As one, loud, celebrative voice, the Clan cheered, "Blossompaw!
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Blossompaw! Blossompaw!"

When the noise died down, Owlstar waved her tail at Treekit. "Treekit - step forward. From this day forward, until you earn your warrior name, you shall be known as Treepaw. Your mentor shall be Wolflungs." The white tabby left Snowtail with a gentle flick of his tail and pushed through the crowd to the front. "Wolflungs - you are a cat of incredible speed and endurance. Fireburst was your mentor, and though he is no longer with us, he is still watching you from Silverpelt. I hope you will pass on all that he taught you into this apprentice."

Wolflungs nodded respectfully and dipped his head to meet Treepaw's. They touched noses, before retreating back towards Scarclaw.

Once again, the cave was filled with the applauding voices of many cats, "Treepaw! Treepaw! Treepaw!"

Owlstar waited patiently for the chanting to ebb away, then she continued, glancing at Tall-Leaf before she mewed loudly, "Skunk-kit - from this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Skunkpaw. Flamepelt you will be his mentor." The bright ginger tom stood up and turned to face Skunkpaw. "You have shown to be powerful and brave, traits that Halfheart passed onto you, and I hope you will teach Skunkpaw equal qualities." Owlstar nodded deeply to the small, white she-cat, who gave a small nod, and turning to Flamepelt, gave an encouraging smile.

Flamepelt touched the tip of his muzzle to Skunkpaw's. "Skunkpaw." The ginger tom congratulated quietly.

"Y-yes. Th-thank you." Skunkpaw whispered, backing away to join his mother.

"Skunkpaw! Skunkpaw! Skunkpaw!" The Clan applauded enthusiastically for a third time.

"Finally, Rock-kit - step forth." Owlstar commanded.

Rock-kit's heart missed a beat. He raised his tail and padded to

stand directly under Owlstar.

"From this day forward, until you earn your warrior name, you shall be known as Rockpaw." She resumed.

Rockpaw! Finally!

"Greyshard - you shall be his- Greyshard?" Owlstar repeated, searching the crowd from atop the HighMound. "Has anyone seen Greyshard? Where is she?" The AirClan leader scanned the assembled cats, Rock-kit knew, searching for the distinctive blue pelt of the bristly she-cat.

Mousefoot spoke up from the back, breaking the tense silence, "She was on a patrol with me and Wolflungs on the Eastern border. She said she had to check something."

Owlstar tipped her head questioningly, but Mousefoot shrugged and looked at Wolflungs.

"Hurry up! Some of us have lives to get back to!" Redsplodge cried bad-temperedly from the entrance to the elders' den.

"Instead of listening to your babbling, we elders could be resting!" Night-Eye shouted, lashing his jet-black tail.

"Er..." Rock-kit stared up at Owlstar, suddenly frightened that his ceremony *would* be delayed. *What if they see it as my fault* again*? What then? Will I have to wait* more *time? Oh, no...!*

"I'm afraid Redsplodge and Nighteye are right." Owlstar smiled gently and closed her eyes, "StarClan can't be kept waiting. Rock-kit - your mentor will be..." she opened her eyes and announced, "Mousefoot."

At once, the silence fell into a burst of muttering. It was well known how mischievous Rockpaw was, and how strict Mousefoot was. Why, most of the Clan would be asking, did Owlstar choose Mousefoot as Rockpaw's mentor?

"What?!" Rockpaw could hardly believe his ears. *Mousefoot! Why him? Of all cats, why* him*?* "But- But- But I- What...?" he stared at

Owlstar, then at Mousefoot, who had padded through the crowd, until he reached the base of the HighMound.

Mousefoot dipped his head briefly and skimmed noses with Rockpaw. Rockpaw tried to duck away, but Scarclaw pushed him forward gently. The new apprentice could scent the confusion and anxiety swirling through Scarclaw's fur, and see it shining in his orange-copper eyes.

"Rockpaw! Rockpaw. Rock... paw..." the Clan shouted half-heartedly, their cries scattered randomly and losing gusto halfway through his name.

Owlstar looked worried and angry at the same time, as she declared, "Good. Now, if anyone sees Greyshard, please direct her to my den. Thank you. This Clan meeting is finished!" she leaped down from the HighMound, while the Clan broke up around her.

Halfheart led Dapplewind towards Redsplodge and Blackeye. They sat there, yawning, and discussing the disrupted apprentice ceremony.

They'll probably start spreading rumours, that it was cursed by StarClan, or some other stupid nonsense. Rockpaw thought coldly.

All the other cats started to mill around in small groups, talking in hushed voices. As Rockpaw stood under the HighMound, he heard Frosttail mew to his brother and sister, "Hehe... I think that Rockpaw deserves Mousefoot as a mentor. I mean, have you ever seen a more troublemaking mouse-brain in your life?"

"Don't be too harsh on him, Frost, he's barley a kit. Can't you remember what *you* did as a kit?" Snowtail asked him gently, smiling.

"Yeah, well, Snow, Frost never sneaked out of camp to see a..." Rockpaw never hears the rest of Icefang's mew.

Owlstar had padded up to him and his newly apprentice siblings. She beamed down at them and nodded deeply when Scarclaw meowed, "Well done, my kits!"

"Yes, I'm so proud of you three!" the fawn she-cat licked Rockpaw forcefully on top of his head.

He tried to push her off, but she let go of him after two licks and started on Treepaw, then Blossompaw.

From nearby, Rockpaw heard Tall-Leaf rasping her tongue along Skunkpaw's ears, "Skunkpaw! Oh, Skunkpaw. Congratulations!"

"Thanks, mum," Skunkpaw seemed much happier than Rockpaw had ever heard him. The black-and-white tom wasn't stammering or shivering.

He *actually has a mother that cares for him! And he always thinks* he's *unlucky...*

Rockpaw lashed his tail once more, when he heard Tall-Leaf mew, "I can't believe you've grown up so quickly! I-"

She was looking over their shoulders, towards the camp entrance, "Who's that?"

Owlstar turned around, so did everyone else in their party. The fawn-coloured she-cat padded around the HighMound and froze in her tracks, "What?"

Rockpaw rushed to her sided, followed by his sisters. A dark figure of a cat was making their way through the tunnel. Then, they came closer to the mouth of the tunnel, and pale light flooded through their pelt. Blue-grey fur was splashed with pale ginger, while distinctive dark but bright green eyes twinkled in the semi-light. Rockpaw quickly recognised the tortoiseshell fur of...

"Greyshard!" Owlstar exclaimed running a few fox-lengths towards the tunnel.

Before Greyshard could open her mouth to answer with a greeting, Scarclaw bounded past Owlstar and shoved his muzzle close to hers.

"Where were you, Greyshard?!" he demanded, his tabby fur fluffing out around his scars.

Greyshard took a step back and pointedly avoided the question, "Back off, Scarclaw!"

Rockpaw saw his father's pelt bristling with anger, as he snarled angrily, "You missed Rockpaw's apprentice ceremony!"

"Yeah, well, I had more important things to do!" Greyshard rolled her eyes and tried to go around Scarclaw.

He pushed her aside, blocking her way, "'More important things to do'?" he repeated furiously, "What's more important than attending my son's and your apprentice to-be's ceremony?!"

Blue-and-ginger tail lashing, Greyshard growled at Scarclaw, baring her sharp teeth.

Rockpaw's mind grew blank, *What did Greyshard mean?*

From beside him, Owlstar charged between the two cats, stroking her tail along Scarclaw's stiffening flank, "Calm down. I'm sure Greyshard had a good reason." Owlstar turned to the blue she-cat and mewed calmly, "Come into my den - I need to talk to you." Swiftly, Owlstar turned and trotted up to the hole in the HighMound.

Greyshard cast a last, satisfied look at Scarclaw, and rushed towards Owlstar. As they disappeared inside, Rockpaw considered eavesdropping on them.

"Don't you dare...!" Blossompaw mewed quietly in his ear as soon as the thought formed.

Rockpaw flicked his tail and pretended he didn't care, that Blossompaw could always guess what he was thinking. He did care though. It was so annoying, having her hovering over you like a fly in Green-Leaf. *She's learnt that from Owlstar. Annoying furball! Oh mouse dung...!* The moment Rockpaw thought this, he regretted it. Blossompaw could be *such* a tattle-tail, but she was chatting with Treepaw a couple of tail-lengths away. Rockpaw let out a sigh of relief, he probably was over-reacting. He made to head towards the fresh-kill pile, his stomach rumbling loudly.

Mousefoot, who was saying goodbye to Silverwhisker, caught his eye. The tabby shook his head and padded over to him. "Now that you're an apprentice, you'll eat when you've hunted for the elders. Understand?" he asked harshly, his grey fur still bristling slightly at the recent events.

"Fine, fine," Rockpaw sighed, puffing up his fur.

"Yes, Mousefoot. Of course, Mousefoot." His mentor mewed annoyingly.

Rockpaw flexed his claws, and felt them digging into the hard, rocky ground. He imagined them sinking into the tabby's flesh, ripping his fur out and teaching him a lesson. Rockpaw barley stopped himself from leaping at Mousefoot's throat. "Yes, Mousefoot. Of course, Mousefoot." he hissed between gritted teeth.

The tabby tom nodded and padded off to speak with Wolflungs.

"Yes, Mouse*dung*. Of course, Mouse*brain*..." Rockpaw cursed under his breath.

Out of the corner of his eye, Rockpaw saw his mother's familiar pelt flashing through the ivy tendrils. He heard Owlstar's voice, but he was too far away to understand the words. Then, he saw Greyshard's colourful pelt clearly through the ivy. She threw her last words politely over her shoulder, before padding off towards Foxnose, sitting with Scarclaw and Morningheart.

Word Count: 1849
Again, not an update, I'm splitting chapters :)

Chapter 4

[image]

Greyshard rounded a thick bramble bush that twisted itself around a pine tree. Infront of her, Mousefoot and Wolflungs chatted like starlings at dawn. They had been patrolling the eastern AirClan border, starting from the topmost corner of their territory and working down towards the 'Cat Cemetery'. Right now, Mousefoot was leading them back to camp, weaving in and out of trees, while the midday Sun shone brightly through the thick branches.

But I need to go back and check on them... Greyshard thought urgently, looking back into the trees. Then an idea sprung into her head, like a rabbit exploding from under a bush.

"You two go back to camp by yourselves. I need to check something." she mewed to the pair of toms ahead of her.

Mousefoot turned around and looked quizzically at her, "What do you mean 'check something'?"

Wolflungs waved his tail impatiently but happily, "Remember the apprentice ceremony? You have to be there!"

Greyshard grimaced in her mind. *Yeah, I remember the ceremony. I also remember that* my *apprentice will be that good-for-nothing, flea-bitten, excuse-for-a-cat Rock-kit! Why in all of StarClan do I have to mentor him?* Then out loud, she mewed, "Yeah, yeah, I know. I just smelt some weird scents back there." Greyshard thought this was the perfect excuse for sneaking away, *and* maybe she would 'accidentally' miss Rock-kit's ceremony!

"Really?" Mousefoot turned around fully and tilted his head, "Here, I'll go with you."

Oh, no! Greyshard quickly put in, "No, it's really fine, Mousefoot! I'll handle whatever I find. If it's an enemy patrol, I'll run back to camp like an AirClan cat can."

Mousefoot looked hesitant, while Wolflungs smiled widely and meowed, "Too right you will! Even though you are- sorry- *were* a kittypet, you still have the speed of our moorland ancestors!"

"Thanks, Wolflungs." Greyshard felt her ears grow hot and she turned away from them, "See you."

She heard Mousefoot's voice mewing after her, "Fine then, bye!"

"Goodbye!" Wolflungs called.

She padded calmly out of their view, and as soon as a screen of pine branches hid her from them, Greyshard broke into a run. Glee flooded every strand of her fur at her marvellous plan. She followed their scent trail back to the lower corner of AirClan territory, but before she reached it, Greyshard swerved East, as if heading towards the MoonRock. After a few minutes, the blue she-cat reached the edge of the forest, where the pines grew less frequently and smaller. Sniffing the sir, Greyshard smelt the musky scent of mice. A heartbeat later, she saw the small grey-brown creature snuffling in a patch of tall grass. Checking the direction of the air, she dropped into the hunting crouch and creeped towards the mouse. It was nibbling on a small, shattered pinecone, trying the sap inside.

With one strong, well-aimed leap, Greyshard pounced on the mouse. She landed squarely on its small shoulders and bit down on its neck. Standing up, the mouse dangled limply from her jaws. Greyshard felt a prickle of satisfaction. It was Greenleaf and prey was plentiful, enough to feed her Clan *and* her secret.

Greyshard padded softly through the thinning woods, painfully aware that if anyone followed her, she would be in big trouble at the end of this path. Every pawstep she took, the ground grew more and more hard-packed. Slowly but surely, the soft covering of pine needles was turning into dust and brown rock. The pine trees steadily disappeared, only to be replaced with tall, spindly, dead trees. Their charred bark were the only visible signs of the fire that had raged here ages ago. Soon, Greyshard smelt AirClan scents, but these were much stronger and precise.

A patrol?!

As Greyshard, whipped around wildly, she realised she was standing beside the scent markers that formed the border. A few fox-lengths away, stood the short, blackened remains of an oak tree. She padded up to, making sure that no-one was following her or near her. Only when she was a tail-length away, could she see the outline of the hollow in the roots of the tree. It was covered into a thin layer of ferns and bracken. Anticipation grew inside of her stomach, as if a horde of butterflies were fluttering wildly there, trying to escape. Greyshard dropped the mouse between two of the longest strands of fern and turned towards the hole.

Pushing her head through the foliage, she called softly, "Hello, sweeties."

After a few moments, three bundles of soft, brown and white fur bundled into her, bowling her out of the hollow. Shaking them off, Greyshard looked down at three kits. One was a fluffy, deep brown she-cat with white paws, belly, chest and chin. Her pale green eyes glittered, while her stumpy tail lashed through the air. The tom-kit next to her was smaller, but his amber eyes glowed with a playful ferocity. His pale brown tabby fur was lined with swirling stripes, quite unlike flattened moths. He grinned broadly up at Greyshard, who smiled back and looked at the last kit. This tom was the smallest of the three, brown tabby patches littering his clean, white pelt. Hazel-coloured eyes stared all around, searching for something unknown to Greyshard.

She swept her tail around them and started nuzzling them in turn. Happiness and relief spread through her, from ears to toes and tail tip.

The light brown tabby cuffed Greyshard's muzzle and laughed, "Gwey!"

Jumping onto Greyshard's back, the brown she-kit mewed happily, "You're back, Gwey!"

Carefully, dislodging the she-kit's short, but sharp claws, Greyshard lifted her and placed her next to the patched tabby. "Yes, my

darlings, I'm back." Greyshard licked each one of them on top of their heads, a warm, fuzzy feeling growing in her chest. "Did you have a nice day?"

Jumping back up, the brown she-kit meowed, "Yeah, Gwey!"

Of course you *did, Coco. You always have a nice day.* Greyshard thought proudly, admiring the she-kits adorable determination and positivity.

Next, the light brown tabby leaped to his paws and swiped at Greyshard's nose as she licked him, "A bit bowing, but I' was okie. Hey! Look what I can do!" he slid into a crouch and waggled his haunches. Once. Twice. Three times. He pounced, landing squarely on Coco's back. For a few moments, they wrestled together, nipping each other and prodding with sheathed paws. They rolled in circles and whirled in a bundle of brown fur.

Taffy. Always so ready to fight. But he does it so cutely!

Finally, Greyshard looked at the last kit. He was staring off into the pine trees, mesmerised in his own thoughts. Taffy gave Coco a final shove and bowled her off of him. Swiftly, Taffy trotted up to the patched tabby and poked him with a claw. He jumped at whipped around to stare at Taffy. The light brown tabby flicked his ears at Greyshard, who felt a stab of remorse. The last kit gazed up at Greyshard, a questioning look in his eyes. Sadly, Greyshard nodded and smiled at the kit.

Oh, Patch... Why...? Why must you be- Greyshard's thoughts were interrupted by a rustle in the branches. She looked up quickly, expecting to see the pelt of a cat, to smell the scent of fury, and to catch the glimmer of their accusing eyes.

It was only a crow, glaring down at the four cats with beady, shining black eyes.

"But you didn't go outside did you?" Greyshard turned back to the kits and asked. Another surge of concern squirmed in her belly. *What if some cats saw them?*

To her relief, Coco answered quickly, her reply sounding genuine, "Na! Don't wowwy. You told us not to go outside, so we not." Coco smiled at Greyshard, before lifting a paw to lick it.

Greyshard laughed gently and mewed, "That's great, Coco!" then, she added, "Listen, I've got a treat for you today!" She turned and tugged the mouse out of the ferns.

As she turned, Greyshard saw Patch's nose twitch and his eyes narrow, heartbeats before Coco *or* Taffy reacted. He mewed, in a slurred, almost undistinguishable, mew, "Is't fwood? Iwery hunglshy."

Disappointment replaced the concern. Why did she have to have to look after a kit with this kind of disability?

Because they're the only kits you'll ever look after! That's why, you mouse-brained fool!

"Yes, it is," Greyshard barley forced the words out of her mouth. Her tongue went dry as she saw Coco and Taffy stare at Patch. They were looking at him with undisguised shock and worry. Greyshard nodded vigorously to Patch, stroking his tabby patched back with her tail. "Here you go." She put the mouse down between the kits, it grey-brown fur shining in the bright sunlight.

Coco crouched down next to the mouse. She stared at it for a few seconds, before looking blankly up at Greyshard, "What is it?"

Taffy pushed Coco aside and sniffed it. He mewed irritably, much too irritably for Greyshard's liking, "It's not milk. I want milk!"

Like a stone flopping into water and sinking to the bottom, Greyshard's stomach twisted with frustration, but a gentle, loving patience all the same. She tucked away the jumble of feelings flying through her heart and focused on what the kits were saying.

"Manners, Taffy! It's called a mouse and it's very tasty." Greyshard mewed to the two kits. To Patch, she flicked her tail at his ear, then at the mouse and at her mouth. Finally, she smiled and licked her lips.

Patch gazed up at Greyshard with the same mystified expression, but slowly nodded. He bent down and took a bite from the mouse's side. Greyshard saw him chew it for many heartbeats before swallowing. Patch started purring and took another, smaller bite.

For once, Greyshard was filled with pride at Patch. He finally did something better than his littermates. "Go on, like that." Greyshard nodded towards Coco and Taffy, who were pulling faces at the mouse.

Hesitantly, Coco nibbled at the mouse's other flank and sat up grinning. Along with Patch, she continued taking small, neat bites of the mouse.

But Taffy still persevered. He turned to Greyshard with a look on his face that made her almost explode with laughter. "I want milk!" he demanded simply.

Shaking her head with amusement, Greyshard mewed, "You can't drink milk for the rest of your lives!" She nudged Taffy further towards the mouse, and he started gnawing on a bone.

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It was very dark under the HighMound, and it took quite a bit of time for Greyshard's eyes to become accustomed to the light. Finally, she settled into a small circle of dusty moss near the entrance to the den. Owlstar's shadowy figure sat down at the back of the cave, in a much bigger nest.

Once Greyshard sunk into the shallow moss, Owlstar mewed in her deep, commanding tone, "So, Greyshard, where were you? I had to give Rockpaw to Mousefoot to mentor." Her yellow eyes glowed in the darkness, shining like two full moons in the night sky. Greyshard could only just picture her head floating in the sky, ordering around every cat like StarClan, when they cover the moon.

Greyshard took a deep breath, casting the image aside, and mewed quietly, not meeting Owlstar's eyes, "I am so very sorry, Owlstar. Please forgive me. I know it was you son and all, but I-"
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Out of the corner of her eye, Greyshard saw Owlstar looking more relaxed as the blue she-cat apologised. However, when she came to the part, where Rockpaw was Owlstar's son, the fawn she-cat's fur fluffed up again. Greyshard looked at her paws and tried not to flatten her ears and snarl.

Infront of her, Greyshard saw Owlstar bare her teeth and hiss, "Oh, yes. He is, isn't he. Well, even more reason for there to be a good excuse." When Greyshard didn't answer, staring at her paws, Owlstar continued, "What was all that about? 'More important things to do'?"

Greyshard cursed herself for saying that in her anger at Scarclaw. If that rotten mouse-brain had closed his mouth, then she could easily get away with it. He was just like Rockpaw - a flea-bitten, badger-nosed, fox-heart of a nuisance! All Greyshard could mutter was, "Yeah..."

She felt Owlstar's eagle-like gaze burning the top of her head. *I might as well tell Owlstar, what I told the patrol, if she does some snooping. And I know she will.* Greyshard thought. She launched into the explanation, looking up at Owlstar through the veil of shadows. "On the patrol, with Mousefoot and Wolflungs, as you know-"

Owlstar cut in and mewed edgily, "Yes, yes, I know who was on the patrol. I practically organised it."

"Of course. Sorry." Greyshard mewed, still looking at her white paws. "Well, as we were returning, I smelt some strange scents."

All of a sudden, Owlstar seemed more interested. She leaned in closer to Greyshard and nodded for her to continue, "Yes???"

"Y-yes. S-so I told Mousefoot and Wolflungs that I smelt some weird scents and I followed them. They led me towards the hollow near the MoonRock." Greyshard took a deep breath and glanced up at Owlstar, before continuing, "I must have followed the cent trail for a long time, because when I came back, of course, I had missed Rockpaw's apprentice ceremony."

When Greyshard finished, she looked up at Owlstar. However,

Owlstar didn't meet her eyes. The fawn she-cat was gazing into thin air, lost in her own thoughts. Greyshard shuffled her paws nervously, and Owlstar mewed distantly, "I see... I understand now..."

Greyshard couldn't believe her ears, "R-really?"

Owlstar turned her head to fix her hawk eyes on Greyshard. She meowed quietly, "Yes. You see, I have smelt the exact same scents as you. I'm afraid I need to talk to my senior warriors; could you please send in Foxnose, Mousefoot, Wolflungs and Scarclaw?"

"Y-yes. I can. Of course, Owlstar." Greyshard slowly fazed out of the shock that Owlstar had believed her so easily, "I hope my answers were satisfactory." She rose to her paws and made to go towards the curtain of ivy.

Owlstar nodded slowly, "Yes, Greyshard, very. Thank you for your help. Now go."

"Of course, Owlstar." Greyshard threw the last words politely over her shoulder and pushed through the vines.

Outside of the den, the faint yellow light barely made a difference to the shadows of the cave. For a moment, Greyshard stood still, surveying the scene. Most of the cats were still out, discussing the ceremony. Quickly, Greyshard located Foxnose sitting with Scarclaw and Morningheart near the HighMound. She padded up to them, overhearing some words of there conversation.

"Congratulations, Scarclaw. You must be proud of your kits. I must say, I was looking forward to mentoring one of them, but alas..." Foxnose was mewing.

"Thank you, Foxnose, your praise is highly appreciated. I just hope, that under their mentors' surveillance, Rockpaw and Skunkpaw will learn some manners." Scarclaw replied calmly at first, then his mew became bitter.

Yeah, at least you got that right! Greyshard thought, then she cleared

her throat and mewed, "Foxnose. Scarclaw." She nodded to each of them, then to Morningheart, "Owlstar wants to see you, and Mousefoot and Wolflungs."

Foxnose looked puzzled as he mewed, "Thank you, Greyshard."

"All the senior warriors?" Scarclaw asked, "Alright. Thanks." Greyshard nodded. Scarclaw trotted up to Mousefoot and Wolflungs and mewed something to them. After a moment, the four cats made their way to Owlstar's den.

Greyshard saw Flamepelt walk up to Morningheart, his sister. She joined them saying, "Hey, Flamepelt. Congratulations!"

Flamepelt nodded and mewed, "Thanks. I was hoping to take you and Rockpaw on a tour of the territory with Skunkpaw. However..." he trailed off, looking pointedly at Greyshard.

"Yeah, sorry..." She muttered, noy fully meeting his pale green gaze, "I had to take care of something, but maybe Mousefoot could go out with you."

That wasn't completely a lie. She *did* have to take care of *something*, technically.

"Yeah, I guess."

A few moments passed, when Morningheart opened her mouth to say something, only to look over Greyshard's head and mew, "Oh, look. Owlstar's calling the Clan again!"

Owlstar climbed up onto the HighMound and called loudly, "Can everyone gather around, please. I have something important to announce."

Redsplodge, who was padding towards the Elders' cave, froze in her tracks. Her red, white and black tail whipped through the air, as she turned around and exclaimed, "WHAT? What did you say?"

"We have to listen to MORE?" Blackeye cried quietly, shaking his

head in disbelief.

Halfheart joined into the fray, mewing waspishly, "I can's sit on this rock all day - I'm not as young as I used to be!"

Dapplewind stroked her back with his tail and mewed gently, "Calm down, sis. I'm sure it's very important."

"Thank you, Dapplewind. And yes - it is." Owlstar waited for the buzz of chatter to fade away, before she announced, "Multiple of our warriors have scented unfamiliar cats on our territory. I must warn you to watch out on the Eastern border. We don't know who we're dealing with, or how many of them there are, but I'm sure we can take care of them. We'll soon find out who it is and chase them out of our territory. Until then, apprentices can't go out alone - they must be accompanied with at least one warrior. Thank you. Now you can go." She leaped down from the HighMound and went into her den without another word.

So that's what it was about. Greyshard thought. *Huh. Lucky that other cats also 'scented' the same 'scents' as me, or I would probably be in even bigger trouble.*

An edgy mew interrupted her thoughts, "About time." Redsplodge said and walked into the Elders' cave, as quickly as she could.

From nearby, Greyshard heard Twilightear mew thoughtfully, "Who do you think it could be?"

Icefang, who was sitting next to him, answered blandly, "Probably just a kittypet from the Twoleg farm. No big deal."

Ha! If only he knew what a lost 'kittypet from a Twoleg farm' actually feels like! I would know, I've been there, and he hasn't. Why do these Clan cats act as if they know everything? Greyshard turned the thought over in her head, until she heard Mousefoot say something from beside her. "Yeah, I agree. Just some lost cat who wandered onto our territory."

From Greyshard's over side, Wolflungs called, "Hey, Mousefoot. Flamepelt and I want to take our apprentices on a tour of the

territory. Wanna come?"

"Of course! I'll just get something to eat." Mousefoot stood up and took a few steps towards the fresh-kill pile, passing Flamepelt as he went.

Suddenly, Owlstar appeared next to Greyshard and called to the grey tom, "Actually, you can go on a Moonhigh patrol later. Now, Rockpaw and Skunkpaw need to complete some of their punishments. I want you, Mousefoot, to take Rockpaw on a hunting patrol for the elders. Flamepelt, I would like you to take Skunkpaw on a separate hunting patrol with another cat, for the queens."

The two toms nodded, "Yes, Owlstar."
Mousefoot looked around to find Rockpaw, while Flamepelt did the same. After a moments hesitation, Owlstar added, "Great. Go on, now. Oh, and Flamepelt. Tell Skunkpaw to go to the Nursery when he's finished. Mousefoot, tell Rockpaw to check the elders for ticks and the like, when you're done."

"Of course." Mousefoot nodded and, Greyshard noticed, a sparkle of glee twinkling in his orange eyes.

Owlstar turned back to Wolflungs and meowed, "Wolflungs you can take both Treepaw and Blossompaw on a tour of the territory. Ask Crystalwing if she wants to come with you. She could use the occasion to get Blossompaw used to herbs."

Wolflungs smiled and nodded, rising to his paws, he asked, "Am I going on the Moonhigh patrol?"

"No. It'll be just Mousefoot, Flamepelt and their apprentices." Owlstar replied.

"OK. Goodbye." Wolflungs waved his tail to Greyshard and Owlstar and trotted across the clearing to Treepaw.
Owlstar turned away from the toms, who were still looking for their apprentices, and nodded farewell to Greyshard. She nodded back, tucking her paws underneath her chest and her tail on her back. Greyshard saw a flash of pale brown fur mixed with fawn. Turning her head, she saw Rockpaw talking to Owlstar.

"What am I supposed to do mother?" he asked.

"You're supposed to ask your mentors and not me. But I guess it can't hurt." Owlstar sighed, "You're going on a hunting patrol with Mousefoot, to feed the elders. Skunkpaw is going out with Flamepelt for the queens. After you've finished, go to the elders. Skunkpaw goes to the nursery - to see if the queens need help. Then, get something to eat, and rest."

Fury filled Greyshard when she heard Rockpaw's reply, "Why?!"

Then delight as Owlstar snapped, "Without eating, you're going to starve - if you don't want fresh-kill, give it to the elders. You're going on Moonhigh patrol - if you don't want to rest, go with floppy paws. Understand?"

"Yes, Owlstar..." Rockpaw muttered, swinging his head to the side. He spotted Greyshard looking at them and snarled, "What are you looking at?!"

"Hmm!" Greyshard flicked her tail and looked at Owlstar.

Her fawn-coloured fur was starting to fluff up, but she was obviously trying to keep it flat. She hissed at Rockpaw, "Don't talk to Warriors like that. Say 'sorry'!"

Rockpaw glared at Greyshard for a few heartbeats. Then, he looked away and murmured, "...sorry..." he stayed where he was, the thick fur along his spine quivering, like the leaves of a tree in a storm.

"Thanks, Owlstar. Is there anything you want me to do?" Greyshard asked, standing up and turning around.

"No, I... Actually, there is. Can you lead the dawn patrol, tomorrow? I'll tell Foxnose about it."

"Of course! And I'll go hunting for the time being." Greyshard purred, happy to have something to do, other than brood.

"Great!" Owlstar smiled and turned. Seeing Rockpaw there, she poked him with a claw and exclaimed, "Rockpaw! Go on - Mousefoot is waiting for you at the camp entrance." He was, along

with Twilightear. Next to him, Flamepelt's patrol was just leaving, with the ginger tom at the head. Behind him, Skunkpaw trotted, looking fairly happy, then Rosesong followed. Owlstar's amused meow brought Greyshard back in reality, "I hope you know where that is."

Greyshard *merrowed* with laughter and got a filthy look from Rockpaw.

"I do! I'm not a kit anymore!" he half shouted.

Greyshard couldn't help herself from commenting on that, "Of course you aren't. I mean, not for the last few minutes, at least."

This time, Rockpaw looked absolutely furious.

I guess being teased by your mother is one thing. And being teased by a Clan-mate is another. Greyshard concluded.

Owlstar gazed at Rockpaw's lashing tail and suddenly mewed, "Actually, Greyshard, you can go hunting with Rockpaw and Mousefoot."

Immediately, Greyshard stopped holding back the laugh. It wasn't there anymore. She stammered, shocked, "Y-yes, of course, Owlstar."
Rockpaw's eyes blazed, but he didn't say anything.

He must know that he'd just get into more trouble. Greyshard thought happily, still feeling dazed from Owlstar's sudden change of mind.

Owlstar called over to Mousefoot and told him, "Greyshard will go with you."

Greyshard saw the amusement and disbelief glimmering in his eyes, as Mousefoot asked, "Greyshard?"

"Yes. It will give her some experience for when she has her own apprentice." Owlstar paused multiple times as she said that, carefully thinking over each word.

I bet she wanted to say, 'It will give her experience for when she can

come to ceremonies on time'. The little...

"Good thinking, Owlstar. C'mon. Let's get going." Mousefoot headed towards the mouth of the tunnel.

"Oh and Mousefoot?" Owlstar called.

He stopped and turned to face her.

"If Rockpaw so much as narrows his eyes at you *or* Greyshard, I will want to know."

Mousefoot's eyes were clearly shining with a playful glee, he chuckled, "Yes, Owlstar. Sure thing."

He padded to the brink of the tunnel, waiting for the rest of his patrol.

Greyshard waved her tail to Owlstar, while Rockpaw didn't look at anyone. When the two cats reached the tunnel, Mousefoot leaped inside. Rockpaw followed. Greyshard went in last, when she saw the tip of Rockpaw's musky brown tail disappear into the darkness.

Word Count: 4118

Chapter 5

[image]

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Yeah, at least you got that right! Greyshard thought, then she cleared her throat and mewed, "Foxnose. Scarclaw." She nodded to each of them, then to Morningheart, "Owlstar wants to see you, and Mousefoot and Wolflungs."

Foxnose looked puzzled as he mewed, "Thank you, Greyshard."

"All the senior warriors?" Scarclaw asked, "Alright. Thanks." Greyshard nodded. Scarclaw trotted up to Mousefoot and Wolflungs and mewed something to them. After a moment, the four cats made their way to Owlstar's den.

Greyshard saw Flamepelt walk up to Morningheart, his sister. She joined them saying, "Hey, Flamepelt. Congratulations!"

Flamepelt nodded and mewed, "Thanks. I was hoping to take you and Rockpaw on a tour of the territory with Skunkpaw. However..." he trailed off, looking pointedly at Greyshard.

"Yeah, sorry..." She muttered, noy fully meeting his pale green gaze, "I had to take care of something, but maybe Mousefoot could go out

with you."

That wasn't completely a lie. She *did* have to take care of *something*, technically.

"Yeah, I guess."

A few moments passed, when Morningheart opened her mouth to say something, only to look over Greyshard's head and mew, "Oh, look. Owlstar's calling the Clan again!"

Owlstar climbed up onto the HighMound and called loudly, "Can everyone gather around, please. I have something important to announce."

Redsplodge, who was padding towards the Elders' cave, froze in her tracks. Her red, white and black tail whipped through the air, as she turned around and exclaimed, "WHAT? What did you say?"

"We have to listen to MORE?" Blackeye cried quietly, shaking his head in disbelief.

Halfheart joined into the fray, mewing waspishly, "I can's sit on this rock all day - I'm not as young as I used to be!"

Dapplewind stroked her back with his tail and mewed gently, "Calm down, sis. I'm sure it's very important."

"Thank you, Dapplewind. And yes - it is." Owlstar waited for the buzz of chatter to fade away, before she announced, "Multiple of our warriors have scented unfamiliar cats on our territory. I must warn you to watch out on the Eastern border. We don't know who we're dealing with, or how many of them there are, but I'm sure we can take care of them. We'll soon find out who it is and chase them out of our territory. Until then, apprentices can't go out alone - they must be accompanied with at least one warrior. Thank you. Now you can go." She leaped down from the HighMound and went into her den without another word.

So that's what it was about. Greyshard thought. *Huh. Lucky that other cats also 'scented' the same 'scents' as me, or I would probably be in even bigger trouble.*

An edgy mew interrupted her thoughts, "About time." Redsplodge said and walked into the Elders' cave, as quickly as she could.

From nearby, Greyshard heard Twilightear mew thoughtfully, "Who do you think it could be?"

Icefang, who was sitting next to him, answered blandly, "Probably just a kittypet from the Twoleg farm. No big deal."

Ha! If only he knew what a lost 'kittypet from a Twoleg farm' actually feels like! I would know, I've been there, and he hasn't. Why do these Clan cats act as if they know everything? Greyshard turned the thought over in her head, until she heard Mousefoot say something from beside her. "Yeah, I agree. Just some lost cat who wandered onto our territory."

From Greyshard's over side, Wolflungs called, "Hey, Mousefoot. Flamepelt and I want to take our apprentices on a tour of the territory. Wanna come?"

"Of course! I'll just get something to eat." Mousefoot stood up and took a few steps towards the fresh-kill pile, passing Flamepelt as he went.

Suddenly, Owlstar appeared next to Greyshard and called to the grey tom, "Actually, you can go on a Moonhigh patrol later. Now, Rockpaw and Skunkpaw need to complete some of their punishments. I want you, Mousefoot, to take Rockpaw on a hunting patrol for the elders. Flamepelt, I would like you to take Skunkpaw on a separate hunting patrol with another cat, for the queens."

The two toms nodded, "Yes, Owlstar."
Mousefoot looked around to find Rockpaw, while Flamepelt did the same. After a moments hesitation, Owlstar added, "Great. Go on, now. Oh, and Flamepelt. Tell Skunkpaw to go to the Nursery when he's finished. Mousefoot, tell Rockpaw to check the elders for ticks and the like, when you're done."

"Of course." Mousefoot nodded and, Greyshard noticed, a sparkle of glee twinkling in his orange eyes.

Owlstar turned back to Wolflungs and meowed, "Wolflungs you can take both Treepaw and Blossompaw on a tour of the territory. Ask Crystalwing if she wants to come with you. She could use the occasion to get Blossompaw used to herbs."

Wolflungs smiled and nodded, rising to his paws, he asked, "Am I going on the Moonhigh patrol?"

"No. It'll be just Mousefoot, Flamepelt and their apprentices." Owlstar replied.

"OK. Goodbye." Wolflungs waved his tail to Greyshard and Owlstar and trotted across the clearing to Treepaw.
Owlstar turned away from the toms, who were still looking for their apprentices, and nodded farewell to Greyshard. She nodded back, tucking her paws underneath her chest and her tail on her back. Greyshard saw a flash of pale brown fur mixed with fawn. Turning her head, she saw Rockpaw talking to Owlstar.

"What am I supposed to do mother?" he asked.

"You're supposed to ask your mentors and not me. But I guess it can't hurt." Owlstar sighed, "You're going on a hunting patrol with Mousefoot, to feed the elders. Skunkpaw is going out with Flamepelt for the queens. After you've finished, go to the elders. Skunkpaw goes to the nursery - to see if the queens need help. Then, get something to eat, and rest."

Fury filled Greyshard when she heard Rockpaw's reply, "Why?!"

Then delight as Owlstar snapped, "Without eating, you're going to starve - if you don't want fresh-kill, give it to the elders. You're going on Moonhigh patrol - if you don't want to rest, go with floppy paws. Understand?"

"Yes, Owlstar..." Rockpaw muttered, swinging his head to the side. He spotted Greyshard looking at them and snarled, "What are you looking at?!"

"Hmm!" Greyshard flicked her tail and looked at Owlstar.

Her fawn-coloured fur was starting to fluff up, but she was

obviously trying to keep it flat. She hissed at Rockpaw, "Don't talk to Warriors like that. Say 'sorry'!"

Rockpaw glared at Greyshard for a few heartbeats. Then, he looked away and murmured, "...sorry..." he stayed where he was, the thick fur along his spine quivering, like the leaves of a tree in a storm.

"Thanks, Owlstar. Is there anything you want me to do?" Greyshard asked, standing up and turning around.

"No, I... Actually, there is. Can you lead the dawn patrol, tomorrow? I'll tell Foxnose about it."

"Of course! And I'll go hunting for the time being." Greyshard purred, happy to have something to do, other than brood.

"Great!" Owlstar smiled and turned. Seeing Rockpaw there, she poked him with a claw and exclaimed, "Rockpaw! Go on - Mousefoot is waiting for you at the camp entrance." He was, along with Twilightear. Next to him, Flamepelt's patrol was just leaving, with the ginger tom at the head. Behind him, Skunkpaw trotted, looking fairly happy, then Rosesong followed. Owlstar's amused meow brought Greyshard back in reality, "I hope you know where that is."

Greyshard *merrowed* with laughter and got a filthy look from Rockpaw.

"I do! I'm not a kit anymore!" he half shouted.

Greyshard couldn't help herself from commenting on that, "Of course you aren't. I mean, not for the last few minutes, at least."

This time, Rockpaw looked absolutely furious.

I guess being teased by your mother is one thing. And being teased by a Clan-mate is another. Greyshard concluded.

Owlstar gazed at Rockpaw's lashing tail and suddenly mewed, "Actually, Greyshard, you can go hunting with Rockpaw and Mousefoot."

Immediately, Greyshard stopped holding back the laugh. It wasn't there anymore. She stammered, shocked, "Y-yes, of course, Owlstar."
Rockpaw's eyes blazed, but he didn't say anything.

He must know that he'd just get into more trouble. Greyshard thought happily, still feeling dazed from Owlstar's sudden change of mind.

Owlstar called over to Mousefoot and told him, "Greyshard will go with you."

Greyshard saw the amusement and disbelief glimmering in his eyes, as Mousefoot asked, "Greyshard?"

"Yes. It will give her some experience for when she has her own apprentice." Owlstar paused multiple times as she said that, carefully thinking over each word.

I bet she wanted to say, 'It will give her experience for when she can come to ceremonies on time'. The little...

"Good thinking, Owlstar. C'mon. Let's get going." Mousefoot headed towards the mouth of the tunnel.

"Oh and Mousefoot?" Owlstar called.

He stopped and turned to face her.

"If Rockpaw so much as narrows his eyes at you *or* Greyshard, I will want to know."

Mousefoot's eyes were clearly shining with a playful glee, he chuckled, "Yes, Owlstar. Sure thing."

He padded to the brink of the tunnel, waiting for the rest of his patrol.

Greyshard waved her tail to Owlstar, while Rockpaw didn't look at anyone. When the two cats reached the tunnel, Mousefoot leaped inside. Rockpaw followed. Greyshard went in last, when she saw the tip of Rockpaw's musky brown tail disappear into the darkness.

Word Count: 2334

Chapter 6

[image]

Not actually an update - I'm just splitting chapters again.

Rockpaw crouched stiffly at the side of the Thunderpath, until Blossompaw nudged him away. The reek of the monster that had passed seconds ago still clung onto the air. It had nearly flattened Rockpaw as it sped by, its unnaturally shiny, red pelt gleaming silver in the light of the full moon.

Two moons had passed since Rockpaw's, Treepaw's, Blossompaw's and Skunkpaw's apprentice ceremony. Since his and Skunkpaw's punishments had ended, Owlstar let them come to the Gathering. Quite some time before, Owlstar had called out the names of who would go to the awaiting AirClan cats:

"Foxnose, Crystalwing, Blossompaw, Mousefoot, Scarclaw, Greyshard, Frosttail, Icefang, Snowtail. Wolflungs, Rosesong, Morningheart, Redsplodge, Dapplewind, Halfheart, Treepaw. Skunkpaw and... Rockpaw."

Littlepaw had been brooding that he couldn't come, and his newly apprenticed sister reminded him gently, "We're too young to go, Littlepaw. Now, let's stay up all night and wait for them to come back!"

Rockpaw remembered promising them, that he'd tell the pair of kits all about the Gathering afterwards. Briarpaw had started squealing with excitement, while Littlepaw showed his happiness with a wide smile.

The chosen Clan cats were trotting all around Rockpaw, bordered on one side by the dirt Thunderpath, and on the other by the musty-smelling Twoleg farm fence. Rockpaw and his sisters were padding at the back of the group, with Skunkpaw not far in front of them. He was chatting with Icefang about his apprenticeship so far.

Pff! I bet he's showing off how he catches way more prey than me. At least I can say that I'm a better fighter than him. Rockpaw thought angrily. With the bitter taste of jealousy on his tongue, he remembered how just yesterday Skunkpaw was telling Morningheart's one-and-a-half-moon-old litter what a good hunter he was. In his mind's eye, Rockpaw saw Risingkit fluffing up with admiration and Lightkit asking question after question. Flamekit, however, just sat there, and listened to every word, no doubt planning to alter it to be about him.

Then, another thought flew into Rockpaw's mind, swift as one of those eagles circling around the tips of the mountains. He barely felt the dust tickling his muzzle, as it rose with his every step. Or the murmur of conversation from his Clanmates. About half a moon ago, Mousefoot had taken Rockpaw battle training near the MoonRock clearing. When it was his turn to mock fight against Treepaw, he easily beat her, flipping her onto her back and holding her down with one paw on her neck, another on her stomach. Then, Skunkpaw came, hissing weakly but fighting as hard as he could with claws sheathed. Rockpaw had slid under Skunkpaw's belly, flicked his legs from under him and leaped onto the black-and-white tom's back. Mousefoot had patronised him how 'ungraceful and messy' his fighting was, 'not using the correct techniques'.

Oh! I could've pulled out his whiskers there and then and showed him 'correct technique'! Rockpaw growled silently.

Suddenly, his paws felt wet. Rockpaw looked down to see he was standing almost belly-deep in water. The Clan had reached the Twoleg stream that fed into the lake. Apparently, Rockpaw was so lost in his thoughts, he didn't notice the Clan turning sharply and walked right into the fast-slowing stream. From behind him, Rockpaw heard Treepaw sigh with undisguised exasperation. He whipped around and flashed out a paw. A stream of silvery-blue droplets soared through the air.

Rockpaw cringed as they fell and scattered onto the grey tabby pelt of Mousefoot.

"Owlstar wants you. She's up at the front." He growled, lashing his tail and shaking off his pelt.

Rockpaw barely stopped himself from splashing Mousefoot again. He nodded and pushed past him, through the tightly-backed crowd of cats.

Only about two cats could walk next to each other here. Rockpaw looked up and saw a jumble of glistening, grey planks above his head. They were arranged to hold what looked like the Thunderpath above the Clan. The wide stream flowed under the tunnel, leaving a narrow strip of overgrown earth on either side.

Rockpaw slid between Frosttail and the dull brown wall of the tunnel. The white tom growled as Rockpaw soaked his pelt with water. Mousefoot followed Rockpaw, with Blossompaw and another cat, Rockpaw couldn't clearly see, behind.

The tunnel smelt of dampness and rotten fish. It went on for two or three more fox-lengths, before the land seemed to fall away. Every so often, a deafening rumble sounded above Rockpaw. The grey planks of Twoleg stuff would creak, their rust-streaked, twig-like branches rattling. Rockpaw had enough sense to know that every time this happened, a monster was roaring along the Thunderpath. Not only because of the *actual* Thunderpath being overhead, but also because, every time, a foul smell sunk deep into Rockpaw's scent glands. The fumes of the monsters were like smoke to his throat, acrid and choking.

A mouse-length ahead if him, Rockpaw saw his mother's fawn-coloured tail disappearing between Scarclaw and Foxnose. He shouldered his way between the two toms and grunted as he came to trot beside Owlstar.

She glanced at him and said cheerfully, "Come on. It's your first Gathering!"

Only because you're a bossy old furball.

Scarclaw squeezed onto Rockpaw's other side as the ground widened. The tabby meowed happily, nudging Rockpaw, "Cheer up!"

Shut up.

Rockpaw could barely feel the long grass when it touched his fur. It didn't come anywhere near his skin. With a surge of triumph, Rockpaw saw Owlstar wince as a long strand of wild barley slapped her shoulder. Her wound from a recent fight against a fox was still partially open, a sign that she wasn't taking her 'rest to make it heal' assignment from Crystalwing seriously. Soon after, Scarclaw hissed quietly as a cattail brushed over his face. A bit of its fluff dusted over Scarclaw's muzzle - he blew it off.

Rockpaw heard him mutter to no-one in particular, "You would have thought, that we would have flattened them by now, storming through here once a moon!"

Grimly, Rockpaw asked Owlstar, wondering why he though the Gatherings were so amazing, "What even is the point of Gatherings?"

Pain shot up through Rockpaw's back paw, as Mousefoot, stumbling, trod on it and snarled, "What do you mean 'the point'? Gatherings have been around, ages before the great Firestar!"

Owlstar mewed in her calming, gentle voice, "It's alright, Mousefoot, he's young - he'll learn."

Young! I'm eight moons old, not two! And I've mastered every one of your stupid fighting moves. I've even come up with my own! Rockpaw was sorely tempted to show them one of his moves. Like his *Double Twist-Turn* - where you slide under an opponent's belly from the front, twist around, as if you're going to go out from their left (your right), but double take and shoot out from behind them and leap onto their back. They won't even know where you are until your claws pierce their skin!

Mousefoot hissed back, slightly cooler than before, "I sure hope so."

Rockpaw's ear twitched when Scarclaw flicked it with his black-tipped tail. The brown tabby mewed, in the most annoying way, "Gatherings are held, so the Clans can meet in peace. So all five Clans can set aside their differences for one night and become friends."

Rockpaw sniffed, "But why do we need friends in different Clans? I thought it was against the Warrior Code."

Ha! I bet even Blossompaw wouldn't be able to think of a comeback. Rockpaw thought, self-satisfied.

However, Owlstar replied quite quickly, not recognising the tone of Rockpaw's mew, "Yes and no. During Gatherings, you find out as much insider information as you can about the other Clans, without revealing too much about your own Clan. You form alliances with other cats, that can be used when we're in trouble, or against them, when we're in battle. Do you understand?"

"So-so."

Mousefoot snorted with impatience, pushing in front of Rockpaw. He paused to let Mousefoot go ahead, and heard Blossompaw mew very quietly indeed, "So excited!"

This is one of her off days... Rockpaw thought. Ever since he could remember from his time as kits, Blossompaw's muteness worked like those thin, metal Twoleg trees that gave off a bright, orange light. Some nights, they shone blazingly and unnaturally, lighting up the area for many fox-lengths around; other nights, they just sat there, fizzing and winking, giving off a faint, yellowish glow. It was the same with Blossompaw, some days she could talk almost normally, maybe a bit quietly but fairly normally. Other times, she could barely form full sentences. She would break off and miss some words, all the time mewing in the faintest whisper. Rockpaw could tell it annoyed her - it was as if, when she wanted to talk to others, her throat would tighten up and she would croak like a toad.

Yet, that didn't stop Rockpaw from feeling angry. He turned his head around to see Treepaw and Blossompaw walking side-by-side, while Skunkpaw's black-and-white pelt shone almost fully black behind them.

Rockpaw fell back to pad beside them and meowed, "Why? *You* have already been to a Gathering." He added sarcastically, "Oh wait, *two* Gatherings."

Blossompaw looked completely dumbstruck. Rockpaw saw her staring at him, from the corner of his eye. She let her tail drop down in her disappointment. A light *splosh* told Rockpaw it had fallen into the stream, which, even in the Greenleaf heat, was still high up. Rockpaw hooted with almost silent laughter, not wanting to alert anybody else. In front of him, he saw Foxnose, Mousefoot, Scarclaw and Owlstar talking about something Rockpaw couldn't hear over the gurgling of the stream. Behind him, he smelt Greyshard, Snowtail and Morningheart, and heard them chatting about kits.

Treepaw brushed her muzzle against Blossompaw's shoulder. The light brown tabby turned to Rockpaw and half-growled, "Don't be so rude! Blossompaw probably wants to see the other medicine cats again." She turned to Blossompaw, most likely expecting a confirmation.

Blossompaw nodded and whispered, "Yes. I really- talk- Poppyspark."

Rockpaw mewed blankly, flicking his tail tip, "Yeah, yeah."

They travelled in silence, as they reached the mouth of the Twoleg tunnel. Rockpaw saw that, where he thought the ground ended, the stream tumbled down into a frothy, noisy waterfall about two fox-lengths high. The overgrown ground either side of the stream crumbled into a steep, rocky cliff. Rockpaw followed Owlstar and the others down the cliff, leaping onto the narrow ledges. Owlstar lead the Clan a few tail-lengths from the shore.

Ahead of the crowd of cats, five hills rose up, creating a hollow. That was where the five Clans met for the full moon Gathering. Rockpaw climbed up the hill, with his sisters on one side and Skunkpaw on the other. When they reached the tip of the hill, Scarclaw stopped and Foxnose crouched down next to Owlstar. He murmured something in her ear, and she nodded. Then she rose to her paws and called to her Clan, "Let's go!"

They sped over the brow of the hill and down into the clearing below. Rockpaw gasped, though he didn't want to. The giant circle of grass shone silver, while the more cats than Rockpaw had ever

seen before, milled around, mewing and sharing tongues. The full moon hung in the sky, scattered with stars that looked like sparkling dandelion fluff. On the opposite side of the clearing, a giant, leafy oak stood tall, with an owl hole high up between its branches. Something pale blue shone inside of the hole, as if the moon itself, but smaller, sat in that hollow.

As they reached the bottom of the hill, the AirClan cats started to spread around, greeting their friends from other Clans. Only Owlstar's little group stayed together. A couple of tail-lengths ahead of them, a spotted blue tabby was chatting with a brindle-coloured she-cat, who left when she saw them coming.

"Good evening, Rainfeather." Owlstar dipped her head politely.

"Hmm? Oh, hello, Owlstar." The blue tabby meowed, nodding back to Owlstar. Then, Rainfeather seemed to notice Scarclaw, and she snarled, narrowing her eyes, "Greetings, *Scarclaw*..."

Rockpaw felt a little bit angry that this she-cat was speaking to *his* father like that. He whispered to their group in general, "What's *she* so worked up about?"

The brown tom felt his heart miss a beat as Scarclaw whipped around and hissed, "*She's* the LakeClan medicine cat. Show some respect!"

But she just...! Oh, fox dung! Rockpaw thought angrily. He had just defended his father, and Scarclaw just told him off. Again.

Rainfeather's blue-green eyes gleamed with malice, "I should have known your *kit* would be so impolite."

Scarclaw looked heart broken for a moment, but he shook it off and growled, "But... Grrrr!"

Owlstar nudged him away and mewed, looking very worried, "Let's go, Scarclaw." After they took a few paces from Rainfeather, who was still glaring at Scarclaw, she said, "I don't know why Rainfeather dislikes you so much."

Scarclaw rolled his eyes, "Dislike is a weak word. She *hates* me!"

Rockpaw saw his mother stare long and hard at Scarclaw before murmuring, "I wonder why."

Very faintly, but it definitely happened, Scarclaw muttered something like, "I only you knew."

Rockpaw's mind whirled, he had never heard Scarclaw talk to Owlstar like that. It was probably nothing, though.

Remembering Littlepaw' first request, Rockpaw turned to Treepaw and asked, "So, who's Deadstar?"

Word Count: 2271

Chapter 7

[image]

Just splitting chapters - not actually an update.

Scarclaw, who was making to follow Owlstar towards the Leader's Tree, mewed to Treepaw, "I'll leave you to it, Hawkears - sorry - Hawk*screech* wanted me to tell him about the Rogue Battle. See you, kids!" he waved his tail and disappeared between a golden tabby with pointy stripes and a sleek dark brown tom.

"Who's Hawkears?" Rockpaw asked his sister.

"Hawk*screech*." She mewed in a matter-of-fact tone, grinning, then she continued, "He's NightClan's medicine cat. He used to be a warrior called Hawkears. StarClan changed his name when they called him to be a medicine cat."

The four young cats started trotting through the crowd, dodging all kinds of cats. Tabbies of every colour and pattern. Tortoiseshells of varying shades and patches. Cats of every colour, size and shape.

"Yeah, yeah, so- Tell me about *all* of the leaders!" Rockpaw didn't mind that he sounded a bit desperate. Who cares, only if he could find out as much as he could.

Treepaw looked ready to burst in laughter, "Have you only just noticed that I'm older than you, and you should listen to me?" Rockpaw growled and she mewed lightly, "Fine, sheesh."

"So, can you see that big black tom, sitting under the roots of the Leaders' Tree? That's Deadstar." Treepaw mewed, as they neared the great oak.

"Why's he called-?" Rockpaw broke off as the shadowy figure came out under the tree roots to greet a pale blue tabby.

A giant, muscular tom stood next to the tabby, his jet-black pelt

shining silver in some places. He had pearly white paws and a thick, white tail, which was twisted into a branch-like, half-bloody mess. His right ear was ravaged in the same way, cleaned up the best Hawkscreech, or any medicine cat really, could do. He had a stubby muzzle with pointy ears and sharp, gleaming fangs.

When he saw Deadstar, Rockpaw gasped.

Treepaw nodded and meowed, "I know. I nearly had a heart attack when I first saw him!"

Rockpaw stared at the mighty tom. Deadstar turned his head to look directly at Rockpaw. After a few moments, Deadstar blinked and returned to his conversation with the she-cat.

"Why are his eyes... different colours?" Rockpaw asked, still gazing at Deadstar. One of the black tom's eyes had been a vibrant blue, while the other a dull orange.

Treepaw half-laughed, half-shivered, "It's apparently really common in NightClan, with all of their black pelts." Rockpaw tilted his head and she added, "I'll explain in a moment."

His sister pointed her muzzle at the she-cat sitting with Deadstar, "That blue tabby who's talking to Deadstar is Flowingstar."

"LakeClan's leader." A quiet voice whispered close to Rockpaw's ear.

Rockpaw jumped and whipped around to see Blossompaw hovering next to him. He mewed angrily, with a hint of fear in his voice, "Great WindClan, Blossompaw! Can you make *some* sounds?!"

She was silent for a moment, looking at her white paws. Then she stared up at Rockpaw and meowed as loudly as she probably could, "I'm mute. Remember?"

Treepaw tried hard to hold back her laughter, she *pffft*ed with it and she stopped sharply when Rockpaw glared at her. The tabby mewed, her voice cracking, "S-s-sorry. *Ekhem.* See that tortoiseshell sitting on one of the roots?"

A black she-cat with muted ginger patches sat on one of the roots,

upright and regal, gazing down at the gathered cats. As she wrapped her bright orange tail around her paws, Rockpaw saw its immense size. It was quite spindly but covered in extremely long strands of fur.

"Holy StarClan. That's a big tail!" Rockpaw gasped.

"Isn't it? That's Pheasantstar of LeafClan." Treepaw meowed.

"A very fitting name."

"BLOSSOMPAW! I swear, scare me one more time and I'll-" Rockpaw snarled, he turned around and broke off.

A quite startled-looking black she-cat stood behind him. Her pelt had a glossy brownish-ginger sheen to it and her eyes were a deep blue colour. They were wide with surprise. She mewed in an apologetic, gentle voice, "I *am* sorry. I didn't mean to scare you." She looked at Rockpaw, her blue gaze locking onto his, clearly expecting an answer.

Rockpaw couldn't move. He tried to open his mouth to fire a sharp retort, but his jaw wouldn't budge. He couldn't rip his pale gaze from her.

Treepaw waved her tail and poked him with a claw, "Rockpaw? Hello?"

He snapped at her, feeling his embarrassment like one of those heat waves, "WHAT?!"

"What did I do?" Treepaw asked, offended, "So, do you want me to continue?"

Rockpaw barely heard her, he tried to not look at the black-brown she-cat, but there was something about her. He mewed, twitching his ears, "What? Oh, yeah, sure."

Treepaw scoffed and pointed at a bright red tom sitting in the middle of a group of three cats near the tree, one was Flowingstar, another Deadstar and the last an unfamiliar dark brown tabby. "Well, that ginger tom, that tabby over there, is Redstar."

"Leader of SunClan." The glossy she-cat put in with a calm meow.

Rockpaw was rolling an idea over in his head.

"I was about to say th-!" Treepaw began.

"Wazoonam?" Rockpaw said quickly.

The black she-cat looked at him, puzzled, and slightly worried, "Excuse me?"

Rockpaw cleared his throat, "What's your name?" He said this quite quickly, trying to not meet the she-cat's eyes, but still look at her.

"My name's Silentbird. What about yo-" she meowed.

"That's a nice name!" Rockpaw couldn't stop himself and his ears felt like they were on fire.

"Thank you. I got it only just yesterday. What's your-?" Silentbird started proudly, smiling gently at Rockpaw.

Treepaw barged in and shoved Rockpaw towards the Leaders' Tree, "You must be so proud, Now, come *on*!"

Rockpaw turned and mewed over his shoulder, "My name's Rockpaw. Nice to meet you!"

Silentbird looked very confused at she glanced half-angrily at Treepaw as she replied, "Same over here!"

Blossompaw and Skunkpaw followed Rockpaw and Treepaw to a secluded area near one of the largest roots of the tree. The light brown tabby looked like she was losing her temper, she asked, fairly loudly, "What was *that*?"

Rockpaw asked innocently, "What?"

"Tha- Oh, never mind. So, do you wanna know more or not?"

"*Yeah*," Rockpaw replied, rolling his orange eyes.

He, Blossompaw and Skunkpaw settled down in a line, waiting for

her to continue.

Treepaw sat down in front of them and started, "Alright then, NightClan cats are mostly black. They smell of rot and are really sneaky."

A shadow fell over her and Rockpaw looked up. A shiny black tom loomed over Treepaw, his bright green eyes glowing with menace. Treepaw jumped out of his way and leaped to join Blossompaw. The ebony tom slid out his claws and let them sink into the grass. They were twisted and yellowed, cracked with tiny lines. He bared his teeth and snarled, "Talk for yourself frog-pelt. *Everyone* knows that AirClan cats will steal your pelt for a tuft of rabbit fur."

A tall blue tabby padded up to the black tom and meowed gently, "Now, now, Crackedclaw. These four are barely kits..."

Rockpaw sensed Silentbird watching from a few fox-lengths away, and he growled at the tabby, "I've been an apprentice for two moons, now!"

"They probably still screech at the sight of a spider and squeal in fear at nursery tales." The tall she-cat grinned broadly. She turned her head and looked directly at Rockpaw. A long, jagged scar covered the left side of her face, parting the silverish fur either side.

Crackedclaw leered at them, "Too right, Streamingmist. But, hey, all AirClan cats are fox-hearts."

Treepaw whispered in Rockpaw's ear, "Ignore them, they're trying to provoke us."

Still sneering, the two cats walked away to a group of cats that smelt of mould and mud to Rockpaw.

Treepaw snarled under her breath, "You can't trust NightClan cats!"

Skunkpaw, who's eyes were narrowed to slits, stammered, "You were saying, Treepaw?"

Bad-temperedly, Rockpaw meowed, "Finally spoken up, have you?"

"It's scary here." Skunkpaw muttered, looking at his white paws.

Rockpaw opened his mouth to mock Skunkpaw more, but Treepaw cut in, "*Rockpaw*...!" she turned to Skunkpaw, "I guess it is, but you'll get used to it."

After Rockpaw gave her a nod, she sat back down and started again, "So, NightClan cats live in the marshes. They eat lizards and icky frogs."

He tried to imagine how eating frogs everyday would taste like. A few days before, he has caught a frog near the fence of the farm. It had nearly escaped Rockpaw as it jumped over the stream. He caught it, but only just, falling into the stream in the meantime.

"SunClan's forest is South of the marshes. They eat squirrels and mice and other rodents. Usually, they're either ginger or tortoiseshell and they're really good trackers." Treepaw was saying. "LeafClan live among the sequoia trees. Sequoias are the tallest trees ever! LeafClan cats are amazing at climbing, so they hunt birds. Most of them have glossy brown pelts, or tabby and white patched fur." At this, Treepaw turned to look back at Silentbird.

She was talking to a brown tabby, probably an apprentice, who, even at this distance, smelt of fish. As Rockpaw gazed at Silentbird, he noticed the tabby's stripes seemed very familiar. The shade of his fur, under its ginger tinge, also stirred Rockpaw's memories. *But why does a random LakeClan apprentice seem familiar...?*

Treepaw's voice snapped his back to attention. She meowed, "LakeClan eats fish, that's why their fur is so shiny, and they swim so well. They live on an island in the middle of the lake, hence the name. Usually, they're blue-furred, but half of them have markings like leopards or jaguars. I mean, leopards *are* the ancient cats who are best at swimming. Finally, there's us. AirClan! We are the smallest, but the fastest of all the Clans. We eat rabbits and we climb the mountains to catch eagles and hawks. Our pelts are..." Treepaw broke off and suddenly looked sad.

Rockpaw asked, "What?"

Treepaw took a breath and mewed, "Well, the other Clans say AirClan is a bunch of kittypets and loners. That's why we have such a variety of pelt colours."

Skunkpaw tilted his head and inquired, "What do you mean?"

The she-cat meowed quietly, "Well, Greyshard is part, something what kittypets call, *Persian*. That's why she has such a flat face. She and Crystalwing were farm cats when they were kittens. Icefang's, Snowtail's and Frosttail's grandparents were kittypets. They're called albinos, those are especially white cats will pale blue or pink eyes. Even Owlstar has kittypet blood, that's why she's such a peculiar shade of brown. It called '*fawn*' apparently. Her father's, Dustystar's, ancestors joined the Clan and became really good fighters."

Rockpaw turned this other in his head. If Owlstar was related to kittypets then... "So... *we* have kittypet-"

A croaky mew interrupted him, "Did ya' say 'Dustystar's ancestors'?"

The group turned around to see an old, golden she-cat laying, stretched out, in the grass. Her slightly darker tail was split in two, the edges bloody but neatly healed. She gazed at them with faded green eyes. Rockpaw smelt the traces of herbs on her pelt, along with the fresher scent of fish.

Treepaw spoke first, "Yes, we did. Who are you?"

"I'm Twotail of LakeClan." The golden she-cat mewed quietly.

Skunkpaw spoke up, his eyes glittering with excitement, "I've heard of you! You're the oldest cat of all the Clans!"

Twotail nodded and smiled, "Yeah, ya' would of, youngster." She stretched her front legs and sat up, meowing, "Back to the poin', I was an appren'ice when Beanclaw and Copperflower go' their warrior names, Bean and Copper they used to be called. Them two cats 'ad came o'er from the Twolegplace as ki'ypets. Once they joined AirClan, they became grea' figh'ers, some o' the best I've ever seen. Soon after, they 'ad a son named Nutfoot an' a daugh'er called Hazelwhisker. Little Hazel wen' on to give birth to three kits:

Honeystep, Milkecho an' Dustystripe. Honeystep became a wonderful medicine ca'. Milkecho became one of the best trackers in the 'ole forest. And Dustystripe... well, one day... he became Dustystar... the leader o' AirClan..." She sighed, closing her eyes, "Ahh... I remember i' well..."

Rockpaw saw Treepaw gaping at Twotail. What was so impressive about her? Treepaw purred, "Wow... Thank you for the story!" Skunkpaw and Blossompaw murmured in agreement.

Rockpaw scowled, but after a look from Blossompaw, hastily mewed, "Yeah, it was cool, I guess..."

Twotail didn't look at all disgruntled, instead she chuckled, "Young'uns these days... You don" appreciate how easy life is in these times..." She stood up and yawned, "Well, see ya'. I wanna sit a' the fron' when the Gathering starts."

As she started to pad away, Treepaw, Blossompaw and Skunkpaw mewed, "Goodbye! Thank you!"

When Twotail had gone, Treepaw asked, "So, what did you think of her?"

Rockpaw sneered lightly, "Meh. She could barely talk properly, let alone tell a good story. I don't know what you three were so interested in."

Treepaw looked aghast as she meowed, "Don't be so mean! Twotail is the *oldest* cat of all the Clans!"

Exasperation filled Rockpaw, "And? Who cares if she's the oldest? I bet she can't even stand up to get a piece of fresh-kill. They probably had to drag her to the Gathering, like an old-" Something sharp flicked Rockpaw's ear. He turned around.

A grizzly black tom with brown streaks stood over Rockpaw, one of his paws raised, claws unsheathed. The tom snarled, "Shut it, kit! Show some respect to your elders. And I'm trying to have a conversation over here. So, stop talking, before I fill your ungrateful mouth with thistledown!"

"Hey, Ravenstorm, take it easy on the young 'paw." a pure white she-cat with blue-grey eyes mewed, coming up to stand next to the black tom.

"Fine, Swanspark. But if he opens his mouth one more time, I'm filling it with nettles. I've had enough of these tiny furballs chitter-chatting! Why did I even have to come to the Gathering?" Ravenstorm growled, glaring occasionally at Rockpaw.

"Cause you wanted to talk with them and plan the next mee-" Swanspark began, but noticed Rockpaw still looking at her, "Hey, what you looking at!"

Ravenstorm snorted, "I told you they were a bunch of over-puffed hedgehogs! C'mon."

Swanspark and Ravenstorm padded off to a group of three cats. Rockpaw only recognised Frosttail, along with a white tom with grey stripes and a brown she-cat.

Treepaw licked Rockpaw's ear, which, he only just realised, was bleeding, "What was that about?"

Rockpaw shrugged, "I don't kn-"

Blossompaw nudged him and whispered, "Hey, look!"

Skunkpaw was staring at the large oak, "The leaders have started the Gathering!"

Deadstar was sitting on the biggest root, Flowingstar on his right, Pheasantstar on his left. Owlstar was standing further around the tree, on one of the smallest roots. Redstar was crouching underneath her. He leaped onto the root next to her in one strong spring. As soon as all the leaders were present, Deadstar yowled loudly, so every cat in the hollow could hear his summons.

Word Count: 2584

Chapter 8

[image]

Blossompaw gazed up at the five leaders, their eyes glowing in the silver light. She, Rockpaw, Treepaw and Skunkpaw stood a few tail-lengths from the Leaders' Tree, cats swarming all around them. From above her, Deadstar nodded to Redstar to announce first.

Redstar walked to the tip of his root and meowed loudly, "SunClan have been blessed with plentiful prey and barely any droughts this Greenleaf. We are proud to welcome two new apprentices: Marshpaw and Mistypaw." He looked somewhere behind Blossompaw.

Most of the cats started cheering, "Marshpaw! Mistypaw! Marshpaw! Mistypaw!"

Blossompaw followed Redstar's gaze and spotted two small cats with their heads down, directly behind her. One was a a brown tom with black paws. The other a blue-grey she-cat with a silverish muzzle that sparkled in the moonlight. As the cheering died down, she looked back up. Blossompaw saw that one of the blue she-cat's green eyes, was pale and dull. It was blind. Blossompaw whipped back around, not wanting to meet the she-cat's gaze, or hers to see Blossompaw's fear.

"We also have also had a new litter of kits born to Ivycloud." Redstar continued. Blossompaw saw an unnatural amount of pride in his green eyes, for a leader to be showing towards regular Clan kits.

"May StarClan bless them, Redstar." Flowingstar mewed.

"Thank you, Flowingstar. That is all from SunClan - would you like to proceed?" the ginger tabby proposed.

Flowingstar nodded and announced, "LakeClan is as full fed as ever. The heatwaves have not managed to lower the lake at all, and we

have plenty of fish on out fresh-kill pile. We too have cats that have gained new ranks. we have a new warrior: Nettlestem." She paused for the Clans to cheer, while an ungroomed ginger tom, near Rockpaw, stared at his paws. Flowingstar mewed, "However, there is also some grave news. A few days ago, a dog attacked a small patrol near the stepping stones. Most of them were unharmed, except for one... Jaguarface now... hunts with StarClan." She choked out the last few words.

The gathered cats burst into gasps of shock and dismay. Blossompaw heard Treepaw whisper to Rockpaw and Skunkpaw, "He was LakeClan's deputy! Oh, StarClan... I bet Flowingstar's heartbroken."

Heartbroken isn't the right word. Blossompaw thought. She sensed Flowingstar's regret and anguish from where she stood. It flew off the tabby in waves, circling through the air like mourning doves, singing their dawn songs of sorrow and hurt. Blossompaw stared up at the Flowingstar, until she saw the leader's blue eyes glittering with emotions.

Something passed through Blossompaw, a shiver of a feeling unknown to her. It rattled her body until Treepaw nudged her gently. Pheasantstar was now speaking, her furry tail swishing calmly through the crisp night air.

The tortoiseshell spoke in a deep, slow voice, that had echoed in Blossompaw's ears, "My Clan is strong and well-fed. We have two new warriors and three new apprentices. Silentbird and Breezerustle are now warriors of LeafClan."

Blossompaw noticed, that as the Clans congratulated the new warriors, Rockpaw called as loudly as he could. She felt a strong passion burning under his fur, an unexplainable desire for something. No, some*one*.

"Cedarpaw, Windpaw and Patchpaw are now apprentices!" Pheasantstar added - the Clans yowled their names - then nodded to Owlstar.

"AirClan's mountains have not failed to give us prey. There have

been a few minor floods, especially near the Thunderpath on the far side of our territories, but nothing to be worried about. We have also been blessed with many kits and apprentices that show great promise. The two apprentices, who couldn't make it last time, are here today, and AirClan celebrates their growing skills. Rockpaw and Skunkpaw!"

This time, Blossompaw applauded, but however hard she tried to cheer, the noise she made was the same as all of today. Quiet, flimsy and slightly croaky. Rockpaw heard it and turned to her. Blossompaw felt the beginning of anger in his look, but it soon turned to understanding and then empathy. He nodded, smiled and looked back up at the leaders.

As soon as the cats stopped, Owlstar opened her mouth to say more. Yet, Deadstar stepped forward and cleared his throat. He snorted derisively, "Now, if you've quite finished your nonsense, NightClan have something much more important we want to discuss."

Owlstar stared at him, as did the other leaders. But before they could react, he yowled to the gathered cats, "All this talk about AirClan having enough prey is a lie!" he didn't stop when some of Blossompaw's Clanmates gasped with outrage, "AirClan's 'sacred' mountains *must* be failing them, because they have been stealing prey from our territory!"

Blossompaw could barely see a single AirClan cat who didn't look furious. Even some cats from the other Clans looked angered by these accusations.

As Owlstar started to mew, "But, Deadstar, I-"

"No, *Owlstar*, we have scented your cats many times on our territory. The same cats every time. Always surrounded with prey scent and blood."

The fawn she-cat stammered, "I swear, Deadstar, I haven't sent a single cat to hunt on your land!"

Deadstar shook his mighty head, "Why should I believe you, when I have all the proof I need? Any cat who sets a paw inside out border,

that doesn't belong to NightClan, will be attacked and punished! Do you understand?"

Treepaw moved onto Blossompaw's other side, to more easily see Owlstar, so did Skunkpaw. Blossompaw was now sitting next to Rockpaw. A small, calico tom sat farther down. Faintly, very faintly, Blossompaw heard him mutter, "Kittypets. Rogues. Traitors. Frog-brained fox-hearts, they are. A disgrace to the warrio- Eeeee!"

In one swift movement, Rockpaw leaped onto the small tom and grappled him to the ground. The cats all around them shrieked and backed away from the tumble of brown, ginger, black, and white fur. Blossompaw saw Rockpaw dig his claws into the other tom's shoulder, while the calico buried his fangs into Rockpaw's throat. They fought ferociously for a few moments, fur and small spatters of blood raining down on the grass. Blossompaw's mind was swirling with their emotions; anger, adrenaline, hunger for vengeance, along with the crowd's surprise, fear, shock and shame.

As soon as her head started throbbing with the pain, Blossompaw edged into the fray. She grabbed a scruff of fur she thought was Rockpaw's and hauled it away from the other tom. Too late, she realised it was the calico. His pale amber eyes burned with a fiery rage for a moment before they fixed on Blossompaw. Some of the flames died out, leaving an empty, burned-out husk of swirling emotions. Blossompaw dropped the tom and ran up to Rockpaw. She started licking his wounds, too many for her to count, only to jump as two booming voices screeched.

"ANTPAW!"

"ROCKPAW!"

Owlstar and Deadstar leaped off of their roots and rushed towards the two toms. Crystalwing and Hawkscreech following. Crystalwing nodded to Blossompaw and smiled gently.

Owlstar demanded, "What were you doing?! Attacking another apprentice at a Gathering! How could you?"

Deadstar growled, "You should be ashamed of yourself, Antpaw!

This Gathering is over!" He grabbed the bleeding Antpaw by the scruff and pulled his away towards a gap between two of the hills. His Clanmates followed him. Blossompaw saw a few cats that she knew. Streamingmist and Crackedclaw from before. Grasstalon and Longpelt from a previous gathering. Hawkscreech whom she had met at two half-moon meetings and a few other faces she couldn't quite remember the names of.

Scarclaw bounded through the crowd and snarled at Rockpaw, "You- We- I- Oh!"

Owlstar lead the AirClan cats back to camp, all of them discussing the fight between Rockpaw and Antpaw. Blossompaw padded next to Rockpaw the whole time, refusing Crystalwing's offers of help, she took care of her younger brother all the way. When they arrived in camp, Owlstar went off into her den with Scarclaw, and Blossompaw led Rockpaw into the medicine cat den.

She added a few dove feathers to an empty nest and nosed him into it. He lay there, grumbling, while she licked his wounds.

After a couple of minutes, Crystalwing told Blossompaw, "Go on to your nest. Shoo! We can take care of his in the morning. At least it'll give you some more experience with herbs."

Blossompaw, her paws feeling like they would drop off any moment, snuggled deep into her moss nest and fell asleep in heartbeats.

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In the few hours before dawn, Blossompaw dreamt of many things, but one in particular remained in her mind.

She was padding along the bank of a river, small bushes and rocks surrounding her. Blossompaw realised she was on the other side of the river, in a small clearing that she had seen of her way to the Gathering. Yet, it was different. Not only was the Sun in the sky instead of the moon, but everything was in shades of grey. From the deepest inky black, to a pale pewter colour. There was no wind, no
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movement, no sound. Blossompaw also noticed, that she couldn't feel anything. The dull grass underneath her paws made no crunching sound, and something even more alarming caught her attention.

Blossompaw could see through her paws and onto the ground beneath. She looked around to see that the clouds showed through her tail and her whole body was semi-transparent, like a clear mist, floating through the air. Insects hung in the air, unmoving, and a fish sagged, immobile, in the middle of a jump, over the foaming water that wasn't exactly foaming. Ahead of her, Blossompaw saw a horrific scene.

Three cats and a dog looked like they were frozen in time, in the strangest positions. The dog was in mid-leap, aiming for a she-cat that crouched over a body. A body of a cat Blossompaw knew well. Flowingstar was staring, petrified, at Jaguarface's body. It was strange to see the tom's normally brown fur in shades of grey. He lay limply, claws scratches and bite marks scattered all over him. Flowingstar gaped at him, her blue eyes, shining with remorse, gazing into Jaguarface's holly-leaf-coloured ones. Blossompaw saw another cat she knew, standing behind the mourning she-cat. Ravenstorm crouched with his teeth bared, but no hostility glowing in his green eyes. His eyes and the other cats' looked strange in comparison to the rest of the scene.

Then Blossompaw realised that the only colours that she could see, were the cats' eyes and the blood on Jaguarface's dead body. Everything else was some shade of grey. Almost everything.

Another pair of blue eyes was gleaming in the darkness of a bush near Ravenstorm. A tortoiseshell was looking over the spectacle, glee shining in her water-blue eyes. Next to her, a different tortoiseshell, with darker patches, was saying something, as her mouth was half-open. The darker tortoiseshell's eyes shone a vibrant orange.

As Blossompaw circled the scene, she glanced at Flowingstar again. The once-blue-tabby was still staring at the bloody, twisted mass that was Jaguarface. Her blue eyes sparkled with pain. Pain that

Blossompaw knew was the loss of a loved one, because she had seen Owlstar's yellow eyes haunted with it.

Next, two things happened at the exact same time. Just as Blossompaw realised that what she was seeing was Flowingstar's memory, the fawn she-cat was sucked into a swirling black pool. It licked at the frozen world and swallowed it in its raven-coloured wings. She was thrown around in a whooshing whirlpool of shadows, before thumping hard onto something soft.

A second later, Blossompaw jerked awake, flailing in a pile of moss. She jumped up and looked around.

Word Count: 1967
I'm proud that I got it out so quick (even though it's really short - sorry)!
Hope you like it!

Chapter 9

[image]

As Blossompaw stared around her, she realised she was in her nest, inside the medicine den. Rockpaw was still asleep, the blood on his wounds half dry. Crystalwing's tail was trailing out of the rock, where she slept and stored herbs. The panic in Blossompaw's stomach died down and she felt joy at the promise of learning more herbs.

When she poked her head out of the entrance, she saw the light of after-dawn through the gap in the rock wall. She turned back into the den and called, finding that she could talk again, "Crystalwing?"

The she-cat's tail disappeared and a moment later, Crystalwing climbed out of the rock, with a few shrivelled-up chamomile stems in her mouth. She mumbled around them, "Ah! You're awake. Come along then, get the herbs you need and wake that dormouse up."

Blossompaw squeezed into the rock and started bringing out mouthfuls of herbs - marigold leaves, cobwebs, rosemary, and even a stem of aloe vera. When she spotted a pile of it, she exclaimed quietly, "Wow! Where in StarClan did you find some aloe vera?"

From outside, Crystalwing chuckled, "Don't tell Owlstar, or Greyshard for the matter, but a few days ago, I sneaked into the Twoleg's garden and took a few different herbs. I knew aloe vera is extremely good, so when I saw it, I took as much of it as I could."

"That *is* smart, even in Leaf-Bare we'll have plenty of herbs!" Blossompaw mewed, shuffling out of the herb store, with the strong-smelling plants in her mouth.

She set them down next to Rockpaw and started nudging him awake. Crystalwing briefly went through the herbs to make sure she had the correct ones. She gave Blossompaw a wide smile and backed into her den. A second later, she reappeared with a spiny, star-shaped leaf. It looked like a cross between a bramble leaf and a

maple leaf. She set it down in front of Blossompaw and mewed, "This is something called goldenseal, it also treats infection. It's quite a bit better than marigold, but I didn't want to tell you, because it's really rare."

Blossompaw sniffed the leaf and nodded, turning to wake Rockpaw up. He started murmuring and rolled over onto his back. As loud as she could, Blossompaw yowled in his ear, "Rockpaw, wake up!"

"Almighty StarClan! Blossompaw! Stop doing that!" He leaped up and winced as his wounds reopened and started bleeding.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" Blossompaw started cleaning his wounds, licking away the blood and scraps of moss, until all he had, were red-tinged gashes half-covered by his thick fur.

He lay unmoving in his nest, breathing heavily as Blossompaw tended to his wounds. She sensed the thoughts and feelings rushing through his mind, like a Thunderpath, monsters roaring by on every side. When she finished cleaning his wounds, she started chewing up the marigold leaves, and applied the pulp to every wound she could reach. Afterwards, she put small amounts of cobwebs on every wound, to soak up the remaining blood. Crystalwing sat beside the rock and watched them closely. At one point, she laid down pawfull of catchweed burrs next to Blossompaw. She nodded her thanks and spread them over his wounds.

Soon after, Treepaw edged into the den, and Blossompaw noticed for the first time, the hubbub of the Clan. She must have been so concentrated, she hadn't heard the patrols going out, or the kits screeching with laughter at they played. Treepaw shuffled through the cover of leaves and asked, "Is there anything I can help with?"

Crystalwing answered, "Yes, please. Could you get us all some prey?"

Treepaw nodded, smiling. She bounded out of the den and returned a few moments later with a young hare clasped in her jaws.

Blossompaw paused from her work and gasped, "Where did you get *that*?"

Treepaw grinned around a mouthful of brown fur, "Wolflungs took me on an early hunting patrol. Near the camp entrance, we saw two young hares on a mountain ledge. When Wolflungs killed one of them, the other leaped down and started attacking us. Now, where can I put it - it's really heavy!"

Crystalwing took the hare from her and murmured, "Thank you, Treepaw."

The she-cat left the den, meowing a quick farewell. Crystalwing laid the hare next to Rockpaw and gestured for him to eat first. He took a few bites grudgingly, the look on his face clearly saying, 'stop treating me like a kit and let me out of this den!'.

While the two cats shared the hare, Blossompaw chewed the rosemary stem and the aloe vera together, tasting their succulent juices flowing onto her tongue. Blossompaw liked the taste of herbs, how each leaf had its own unique combination of sweet, bitter, sour, salty and bland. Other cats seemed to dislike herbs, but Blossompaw loved trying each herb they gathered. Sometimes Crystalwing teased her, that if, for some reason, she ever went blind, Blossompaw could tell each herb from only the smell and taste. Blossompaw had to agree that was probably true.

When the poultice was ready, she took a piece of fresh moss and spread it all over the little green ball. She dipped the moss briefly in the stream and started rubbing Rockpaw's pelt with it. His muscles tensed at the dampness of it, but relaxed as he felt the soothing sensation that the rosemary and aloe vera gave. After a a few minutes, she stopped and carried the shaggy moss-ball out of the den.

Blossompaw padded across the clearing and leaped over the stream near the middle. She made her way to the mouth of the dirtplace tunnel, only to be thrown back as a small bundle of blue fur crashed into her. She dropped the moss-ball squarely on Stonekit's fluffy head.

The young she-kit mewed happily, "Oops! Sorry, Blossompaw."

"It's OK. Where're you going?" Blossompaw asked.

"Treepaw said that she'll show us a hunter's crouch, so I had to hurry when I went to make dirt!" Stonekit mewed excitedly, pounding off to the nursery, where Treepaw and Stonekit's littermates were waiting.

Blossompaw followed the dirtplace tunnel outside. The dirtplace was a circular, enclosed clearing of brambles, large holly bushes and young hazel trees. She deposited the soaked moss-ball near the entrance and trotted back to her den.

Inside, she found Rockpaw fast asleep again, and Crystalwing sorting through a pile of herbs in front of the rock. She heard the calico mutter, "...low on juniper and borage... and there's barely any moss left as well..."

"Do you want me to go out and get some more?" Blossompaw asked in a whisper.

Crystalwing jumped, as if she didn't hear Blossompaw come in. the she-cat replied quietly, "Thanks for offering, but I think I'll go. Can you sort through the dry herbs, please? All this Greenleaf weather is no good for them."

Blossompaw nodded, smiling, and replaced Crystalwing at the foot of the rock. She waved her tail in farewell to Crystalwing, as the she-cat slipped out of the den. Blossompaw looked down to see a jumble of herbs, their state varying from slightly dry to completely withered. She started to lay them out, sorting through them until she had a neat pile of each herb. Then, she pulled each pile towards her, and threw the juiceless leaves aside. Wild Garlic. Broom. Poppy. Dock. Oak. Burnet. Tormentil. Lamb's Ear.

At one point, Rockpaw stirred and licked up a few mouthfuls of water from the stream. He nodded stiffly to Blossompaw and settled back into his nest, his legs moving awkwardly. After a few moments, he was asleep again, and Blossompaw continued working. Feverfew. Goldenrod. Sorrel. Horsetail.

A couple minutes later, Twilightear padded into the den with Littlepaw limping behind him, wincing with pain. Littlepaw glanced at Rockpaw's immobile body, sleeping in his nest, and scowled.

Twilightear mewed, "Littlepaw here was chasing a rabbit when it ran under a bramble. He's got thorns everywhere. Can you help him, please?"

Blossompaw nodded and grabbed a mouthful of dock leaves and cobwebs. She sat next to Littlepaw and started sniffing his fur. He had a thorn under his eye, at the tip of his tail, a few on his back and legs, and even one stuck in his pad. She took that one out first, squeezing the pad either side, until it nearly popped out. Littlepaw cringed, but didn't move away, hissing when Blossompaw spread dock juices over it and covered it with cobwebs. She pulled out every thorn she could find, Littlepaw pointing to one that she missed, and layered each wound with a pulp of dock and a cobweb. Half-way through, Crystalwing returned with bundles of herbs in her mouth. She nodded at Blossompaw, pride shining in her blue eyes.

When she licked the last one clean, Blossompaw mewed, "Done. Oh, and, before you go to sleep, take off the cobwebs and give all of them a good lick, OK?"

Littlepaw nodded and mewed, "Thanks, Blossompaw."

Twilightear smiled at Crystalwing and guided Littlepaw out of the den. When they were gone, Crystalwing gave Blossompaw a few friendly licks and whispered, "Well done, Blossompaw."

"Thank you." Blossompaw murmured back and returned to the piles of herbs. She added, pointing her tail to the neater, more colourful piles, "And I finished sorting those, if you want to have a look through them."

Crystalwing dipped her head and put each pile of herbs back into the rock. They both finished at roughly the same time.

Blossompaw mewed, padding towards the entrance of the den, "I'll get us some fresh-kill. Is that alright?"

Her mentor replied, turning back from the rock, "Ooh. Yes, thank you. Can you bring us an eagle if there's one?"

Blossompaw nodded and trotted through the curtain of yew leaves. She reached the fresh-kill pile, just as she saw Stormkit again. "What're you up to now?"

The blue she-kit stopped next to the other hare, that Blossompaw assumed, Wolflungs caught earlier. She panted, "Silverwhisker said we can go listen to the elders' stories until dusk! She told me to get them a gift, so they'll be in a good mood."

Blossompaw smiled and mewed softly, "Then, you'd better get someone to help you carry that hare over to them."

"Can you, please? Stonekit, Pebblekit and Bramblekit and already inside the cave." Stormkit asked, blinking up at Blossompaw.

She sighed, giving into the kit's pleas, and 'helped' her carry the hare inside the Elders' cave. Stormkit's littermates were laying next to Halfheart, on the edge of her nest, the rest of the elders sitting around them. When Blossompaw laid the hare down in the middle of the cave, Redsplodge cried in delight, "Ah! Finally, some decent prey!"

Nighteye added, sniffing the limp hare, "Yes! Those apprentices keep on bringing us bones to eat."

Dapplewind and Fallenbranch nodded their thanks to Blossompaw, while Halfheart mewed, glancing at Blossompaw with a pointed look, "Thanks Stormkit. Now, that you're here, we can begin."

"What do you want the story to be-" Dapplewind was saying.

Blossompaw murmured goodbye and padded back to the fresh-kill pile. She picked up a dark brown eagle and dragged it over to the medicine den. Before she entered, she looked up to see the deepening red light of sunset snaking into the cave, throwing shadows onto the cat-filled ground.

Inside the medicine cat den, Rockpaw was awake, licking his fur where the poultice wasn't. Crystalwing was putting the remaining balls of moss she gathered into the corner. After they had all eaten their fill, Rockpaw curled up in his nest. Blossompaw checked him

over briefly, sniffing his wounds for signs of infection or muscle strain. She murmured goodnight to him and Crystalwing, before settling into her scoop of moss.

She tossed and turned, until the golden light seeping through the yew branches turned into a dark red, then silver. Moonlight was filtering through the branches when she drifted off into blackness.

Almost immediately after she fell asleep, Blossompaw felt a muzzle nudging her gently and a soft voice whispering, "Wake up, Blossompaw. Wake up."

Word Count: 2038

Chapter 10

[image]

Blossompaw opened her eyes. She wasn't in her nest anymore. Or anywhere in camp. Or AirClan territory for the matter. She was curled up at the bottom of a grassy hollow. The air smelt fresh and clean. The night sky twinkled with stars and a waning full moon. She was somewhere she had been before.

A large, gleaming, translucent rock sat in the middle of the hollow, a few tail-lengths in front of her. Ivy and moss snaked up it in small patches. The moon shone down a bright stream of silver light. When it hit the rock, the light exploded from every side, in shades of blue and white. Blossompaw was in the MoonRock hollow.

The voice spoke again, "Blossompaw?"

She jerked up, whipping around to see a small tortoiseshell she-cat sitting behind her. The she-cat's fur was pale and littered with stars. They swirled around her paws and twinkled in her orange eyes. She gaze off a pale glow and looked wise beyond her years. The she-cat mewed quietly, "Greetings, Blossompaw. I am Marigoldpaw."

Blossompaw didn't know how to answer, so she asked shakily, "A-are you... a S-StarClan cat?"

"Indeed." Marigoldpaw nodded.

"W-why... did y-you... why are you here?" Blossompaw asked again, trying not to fidget.

"I think... the real question is... Why are *you* here?" Marigoldpaw mewed, staring into Blossompaw's eyes.

"I-I d-don't know. W-why *am* I here?" Blossompaw glanced around, trying to see if any familiar cat was near them.

"Do you want me to show you?" the tortoiseshell asked. Without an

answer, she stood up and bounded past Blossompaw, heading to what should have been LeafClan territory.

Blossompaw clumsily rose to her paws and skittered after Marigoldpaw. She saw the she-cat's black-and-red fur disappearing over the rise. Blossompaw ran over the edge of the hollow. She followed Marigoldpaw's glowing figure sharply South and then around the LeafClan Crater. At the middle, Marigoldpaw dipped down more, with the Cat Cemetery on one side and the Cow Pastures on the other.

Ages passed and Marigoldpaw slowed down, letting Blossompaw catch up. She was out of breath, panting and huffing. When she looked up, Blossompaw saw the Thunderpath in front of them. A red stone wall bordered it further down. Beyond that she could hear and smell the bustle of Twolegs. Their dens towered high above them.

"Wh-where a-are w-we...?" Blossompaw wheezed.

"This is the Twolegplace." Marigoldpaw mewed, staring at the red wall, "It starts down at the bottom of SunClan territory, goes up to past here and stretches off far beyond Clan land."

"Why are we-" Blossompaw started, but Marigoldpaw ran off again.

The tortoiseshell ran up the edge of the Thunderpath and into the Twolegplace. Sighing, Blossompaw followed. It was nowhere near the peacefulness of a Clan night. Unnatural, yellow lights seeped through holes in the Twoleg dens. Tall, skinny, black trees lined the Thunderpath. They had no branches, but their tops curved to the side and gave off the same bright glow. Monsters were either roaring past every so often or sleeping on the edges of the Thunderpath. It was wide enough to fit four monsters easily, with spaces in between. Harsh smells and sounds came from every side.

Marigoldpaw ignored it all, pounding along the hard, grey paths of flat rock. When a Twoleg climbed out of one of the dens and into a monster, Blossompaw backed away hurriedly.

Marigoldpaw mewed calmly, trotting past the Twoleg, "Don't worry.

They can't see or touch us. You're dreaming, remember?"

Blossompaw nodded slowly and picked up her pace. Marigoldpaw stuck to the main Thunderpath, not taking any of the small ones or alleys that they passed. What seemed like hours passed, when the Thunderpath sloped up. The tortoiseshell didn't stop, she kept on going. Blossompaw glanced down, her paws aching, and she what she saw, gave her heart a fright.

The Thunderpath arched over a wide river snaking its way through the Twolegplace. There was room for two monsters on this section of the Thunderpath, with a narrow strip of raised ground for the Twolegs. A rusting, dark green fence bordered the edge of the Thunderpath, made out of thin, criss-crossing shiny vines. Marigoldpaw nudged Blossompaw on, walking right through the Twoleg crowd.

They reached the other riverbed and the Thunderpath widened to four-monsters-wide. Another Thunderpath crossed over this one, right where the first one sloped down. The tall trees were still there, but different ones grew in the middle. They had three different colours of blaring lights, each turning off and on in a sequence.

Marigoldpaw padded on, Blossompaw following her wearily. Finally, Marigoldpaw stopped a few tree lengths from the river. The tortoiseshell looked around and sniffed. She nodded and sat down.

There was a wide alley to their left. Twoleg rubbish covered the ground in towers, with a narrow path leading all the way into inky darkness. Suddenly, a cat loomed out of the shadows. It wasn't like one of those fat kittypets sitting in the holes of Twoleg nests, or the scrawny loners hiding in alleyways. This cat was giant, his muscles rippling under his thin calico pelt. He was glaring all around the pathway, his emerald-green eyes gleaming with threat, as if her was guarding it.

Marigoldpaw slipped past him, signalling for Blossompaw to follow. She did, keeping the calico in sight, until the heaps of rubbish hid his from view. Marigoldpaw led Blossompaw past many more cats, most of which looked skinny and depressed. A black tom. A grey-brown tabby. A dark ginger she-cat. Two identical, silver tabbies.

But there were also larger cats among them, sitting higher up on the rubbish piles, and looking much more well-fed. A white she-cat with miss-matched eyes. A pale brown tabby with spiky fur. A black tom with dark brown smears.

Blossompaw trailed after Marigoldpaw to the end of the alley, where a wooden fence blocked their path. There was a gap in the bottom, where one of the narrow planks of wood was pulled back. A pale ginger tabby sat beside the gap, eying the scraggly cats threateningly. The two she-cats climbed through the hole, the wood pulling against Blossompaw's fur.

Marigoldpaw bounded across a criss-crossed Thunderpath and up to a large Twoleg nest. There was no lights or loud noises coming from inside. The tortoiseshell padded up to a piece of stone with narrow, jagged ledges. It leading to a tall rectangle set into the wall of the nest. A black-and-white tom sat next to a flap in the bottom of the rectangle. Marigoldpaw stepped right through the flap, without even moving it, and disappeared into the den.

Blossompaw hesitantly put a paw to the flap. Her paw went right through, without disturbing it. She pushed herself through the wall, a shiver sliding down her spine. Inside was a long, tall tunnel with more of the rectangles and tall holes branching off on either side. At the end of the tunnel, there was another slope with the ledges, leading up to another level of the den. Marigoldpaw skipped a few of the rectangles and stopped in front of the third one on their left. It was slightly open, and shadows flittered between the gap underneath it and the floor.

Marigoldpaw nodded towards the rectangle and then gazed at Blossompaw with her deep orange eyes. Blossompaw gestured to the gap with a mixture of panic and confusion. She could hear mews coming from inside. The tortoiseshell blinked, sitting down, and kept on staring at Blossompaw. Marigoldpaw whispered in a monotonic voice, "If you don't go in, you'll never know what's to come."

"What *is* to come?!" Blossompaw asked frantically, panic rising in her.

"Something that could destroy your Clan and all of them from their cores." Marigoldpaw answered, watching at Blossompaw.

"Wh-what is it?" she inquired.

Marigoldpaw said nothing but gestured to the gap. Blossompaw gulped and stepped through the rectangle and into a large cave-like hollow in the den. Colourful, weird-shaped rock structures littered the floor. Some looked as if they were made of wood and stood on four spindly legs. Others were stout and tall, covered in smaller, round, soft-looking rocks or giant, bright, square leaves. The walls were unnaturally flat with thin, narrow ledges scattered horizontally across them.

Cats were gathered everywhere, except for the ledges. All of the ones laying and resting on the rocks were well-groomed and bulky. However, the ones shuffling along the ground looked under-fed and skinny, like the cats in the alley. They were pulling hard, white leaves along the floor. Offering the mice and Twoleg food on them, to the cats lazing on the rocks.

Catching her attention, a ginger-brown tabby climbed onto one of the rocks set against the wall. He shimmied up to the top and leaped onto the largest ledge. He yowled loudly, and, immediately, every cat turned their attention to him.

As he started to announce, Blossompaw felt her limbs giving way beneath her. Her vision was fading into black, and her legs buckled.

In the darkness that followed,
Marigoldpaw's voice rang out, a hint of ice to her gentle mew,
"*When the lake's banks begin to dry, a new evil will arise, from the darkest bowels it shall strike, until the five put it out with a crashing wave...*"

Blossompaw opened her mouth to mew, but her voice was gone. Or was she just deaf? Then, she felt five other cats around her. Even though, she was seemingly blind and deaf, she could... *sense* their presence.

As she was about to smell the air, a flash a red filled her vision for a

heartbeat, like blood spilling over her eyes. A deafening shriek resounded all around her and a menacing laugh echoed in her ears.

She jolted up awake in her nest, for the second time in two days, from a hideous nightmare. Once again, the glowing light of dawn seeped through the yew branches of the den.

Rockpaw was still sleeping, while Crystalwing was washing herself beside the rock. Blossompaw shook her head, trying to clear the dream from her head.

Why would StarClan come to *her*, a barely apprenticed trainee, and give *her* a prophecy? It was all nonsense from eating too much of the eagle. *A danger, indeed...* Blossompaw thought bitterly. She rose to her paws and padded over to Crystalwing.

Word Count: 1762
That came out quick xD
Hope you like it!

Chapter 11

[image]

Greyshard gazed at the glimmering scenery around her. The dew was shining in iridescent colours of fuchsia and aquamarine, the dawn light bouncing off every soaked leaf. She, Owlstar, Scarclaw and Foxnose were padding down the Eastern border again, starting the dawn patrol. Greyshard knew the only reason that she was on the patrol, is that Owlstar wanted her and Scarclaw to warm up to each other again.

But that wouldn't work, because Greyshard was planning to sneak off again, to check on 'her' kits. She bounded after the other cats as their tails disappeared around a large patch of ferns. "Owlstar," she began, "Can I go ahead and check if the coast is clear?"

Owlstar turned around, frowning, "But I wanted to-"

Scarclaw cut her off, waving his tail and nodding, "Feel free to go anywhere you want."

Owlstar flicked him over his ear and hissed, "Scarclaw!"

"It's alright, Owlstar. I'll just check up the border line and come back before you can say 'eagle'." Greyshard mewed, holding back a laugh at Scarclaw's expression.

"Well... Alright then... Off you go but come back quickly." Owlstar called hesitantly.

Greyshard nodded and, smiling, raced off past the patrol and into the spindly trees. She rounded pine after pine, before she came to the now familiar expanse of grassland dotted with trees. She looked over her shoulder, laid a quick scent-marker on a patch of bracken, and trotted over to the half-burnt tree.

She doubled back and quickly caught a young rabbit, that had foolishly bounced out of a hollow nearby. She pulled it over to the

tree and called, "Kits!"

Coco and Taffy stumbled sleepily out of the hollow in the trunk. Coco yawned and looked up. When she saw Greyshard, the little she-kit yowled happily, "Grey! Yippee! Can we play now? We been sleeping all mornin'."
Taffy nodded and mewed, "Yeah! Come an' play with us!"

Greyshard sighed and pushed the rabbit towards them, "I'm sorry, my sweets. But I need to go back soon. I'll stay with you for a few minutes, and we can play a few rounds of moss-ball. OK?"

The kits' ears drooped but pricked up at 'moss-ball'. Coco bundled back into the den and came out a few seconds later with Patch. He gazed around him, then focused on the rabbit. He padded up to it, glanced at Greyshard, and took a bite. His brown ears twitched, and he started purring. Greyshard looked on proudly as each of the kits took a few bites. After they had eaten their fill, Greyshard stood on her hind legs against the tree. In a small dip in the bark, a fox-length above the ground, a small growth of moss poked out.

She jumped off the ground, digging her back claws into the upper roots of the tree. Greyshard pushed herself up until she made it past the moss and onto the lowest branch. From there, she leaned down and clawed off a piece of the dull greenish-brown plant. Crouching on the branch, she rolled it into a ball and threw it a couple of tail-lengths away from the tree.

At once, all three kits flew towards the ball. Taffy led the first few rabbit-hops, but then Coco overtook him. Suddenly, Patch tripped over and splayed out in the scrubby grass. Coco and Taffy stumbled to a halt and ran back towards Patch. He raised himself off the ground, trembling. Greyshard was about to leap off the tree and go up to him, when he charged between his siblings, knocking them over. He scooped up the moss-ball, jumped over Taffy, and stopped beneath the tree.

Patch was smiling widely, trying to hold back purrs of laughter. Greyshard clambered down the tree and stood in front of him. She tried to put on an angry face, but she started laughing and licked Patch's ears. She called to the other two, who were shuffling over

with disgruntled looks, "Hey! Don't be sore losers! Let's have another round."

Coco and Taffy looked happier at this and scrambled up to them quickly.
Suddenly, Greyshard heard a faint screech coming from the border line far behind her. She turned to see a flock of larks rise up from a few tree-lengths away. Whipping back around to face the kits, she mewed apologetically, "I have to go. Stay in the den and do *not* come out. Do you understand?"

From the expression on Greyshard's face and the birds swirling in the sky, Patch must have known what was going on. His ears drooped and he let the moss-ball fall to the ground. Coco slumped to the dusty ground, grumbling.

Taffy groaned, "What? But Grey-!"

"No 'buts'! I'm really sorry, but I *have* to go. I'll come back later, alright?" Greyshard nuzzled the kits in turn. She spun around and bounded back into AirClan territory.

Dodging the thickest undergrowth and the widest trees, Greyshard sprinted along her scent trail. Her long fur fluffed up behind her, bile rising in her throat. She knew what screech. Or at least recognised the cat it belonged to. Every leap she took, more and more screeches met her ears, becoming louder and more fast-paced with every passing heartbeat.

She slowed when she reached the edge of a clearing, bordered by thick walls of giant ferns. Many scents came to her through the growth. Greyshard could smell Owlstar, along with Foxnose and Scarclaw. But there was one unfamiliar scent. It stunk faintly of Twolegs and monsters, and there was the ever-lasting hint of fresh blood and rotting prey to it.

Hesitantly, Greyshard parted the ferns and crouched as low to the ground as she could. She slid through the brittle stems and peered out when she reached the edge, trying to stay in their shadows.

She tried to hold back a gasp, but it came out, nevertheless.

Owlstar, Foxnose and Scarclaw were in the middle of a fight. Their fur was soaked scarlet, and their pelts lined with deep slashes. Owlstar was laying on the ground against a rock, blood seeping from, it seemed, every part of her body. She was sprawled out on her side, sides heaving, eyes narrowed in agony. Scarclaw was crouching in front of her, teeth bared and eyes gleaming. His legs were trembling and each of his scars had been reopened, spilling out fresh blood. Foxnose was, apparently, recovering from hitting his head on a rock. The back of his head glistening a bright red in the sunlight.

A dark tortoiseshell stood in front of Scarclaw, her front legs dripping with blood, but no wounds were there. She was gazing into Scarclaw's orange-copper eyes. Her blue ones weren't filled with exhaustion or danger. They were shining with a death threat and positively spilled out glee. In a single heartbeat, the tortoiseshell leaped at Scarclaw. She grabbed his head with her front claws and slammed it into the ground. Not giving him a second to recover, she jumped onto his back and turned the nick in his left ear to a giant tear. She just dodged his snapping jaws and landed on the ground a tail-length away, with a surprising amount of grace.

As Foxnose barrelled shakily towards her, the tortoiseshell stood up on her hind legs. She slashed both of her unsheathed forepaws across his muzzle. The moment he landed on the ground, she was on top of him, digging her back claws into his flank and belly. She pushed off of him and bounced off Scarclaw. She looked like a blackbird, the way she moved, jumping swiftly from each cat, as if she was flying branch to branch on her ebony wings.

To her extreme displeasure, Greyshard felt a bubble of envy growing in her heart. She tried to ignore it, but it kept expanding. Greyshard felt in awe at how smoothly the she-cat attacked. Using every second to her advantage, not letting the enemy even land a single scratch on her. *What enemy?!* Greyshard scolded herself quietly, *They're my Clanmates!* But she felt reluctant to join the fight. Not only did Coco, Taffy and Patch need her, but all of these cats were some of her least favourite in the Clan. She wanted to keep watching, even if it meant breaking the Warrior Code.

Then, what the dark tortoiseshell did next, chilled Greyshard to the deepest parts of her bones, shaking away the jealousy and wonder. While Foxnose was still recovering and Scarclaw was trying to stand up, the unfamiliar she-cat had swiftly leaped onto Owlstar, who seemed to not realise what was happening. The tortoiseshell dug her claws into Owlstar, one paw on her throat, another on her stomach, the third balanced on the ground, and the last hanging in the air.

Greyshard had just made up her mind to leap in and help when the dark tortoiseshell's ears twitched. Her paw froze in mid-swing, most of her foot hidden by a dripping cover of vivid blood. Her blue eyes stared ahead for another moment, before turning to the forest beyond the ferns. She hesitated, glancing at Owlstar's feeble defences, before she sprinted through the undergrowth and disappeared. Greyshard rose to her paws and ran towards Owlstar.

"Owlstar! Owlstar! Are you OK?" Greyshard asked, licking her leaders wounds as quickly and efficiently as she could.

The fawn she-cat groaned squeakily, the blood bubbling eerily in her wounds. Scarclaw limped over to them, wincing as every one of his movements spilled more blood.

"Lay down. You'll only make it worse!" Greyshard ordered. Forgetting the mild hate she had felt towards the tom moments ago, she nudged him to the ground.

Scarclaw lay there, panting, not even trying to argue. His flanks were almost bare of fur. His wounds, though much less severe than Owlstar's, were still horrible. Greyshard started to lick his wounds, but he feebly batted her away. The pain radiated off of him, just like the blistering rays of the Greenleaf sun. Greyshard stared back at Owlstar who had stopped moving. She turned back to see if Foxnose was OK, only to whip back as she realised that stillness was not alright.

She bounded up to Owlstar. The she-cat had her eyes closed and her flanks were still. Greyshard screeched over her shoulder to Foxnose, "How many lives does Owlstar have left?"

"What just- Why do you need to-" the ginger tom, who had risen to his paws, looked up at Greyshard. His dark green gaze fell on Owlstar's immobile body. He gasped and stumbled over to them, leaving faint pawprints of blood in his wake.

Together, they gazed down at Owlstar's body. a few moments passed. Suddenly, Owlstar heaved a deep, loud breath. Her hawk-like eyes shot open, and she tried to get to her paws.

"Stay still." Greyshard murmured, gently pushing Owlstar back down.

"Where is she...? What happened...?" Owlstar asked, the words unsteady and ragged.

"It's alright. She ran away." Foxnose licked Owlstar's ears, "Greyshard chased her off."

It took Greyshard a few seconds to process Foxnose's words. Then guilt consumed her. She wanted to be a hero, but her conscience was shaken. She took a few steadying breaths and answered quietly, "Yes... Yes, I did. She's gone. You're safe."

To her surprise, Owlstar knocked Greyshard's paw away. The fawn she-cat asked, half-snarling, "What about Scarclaw? I can't lose him again. Where is he?"

Foxnose pointed his muzzle over to the brown tabby heap of fur, a fox-length away. Owlstar pushed past Greyshard and rushed over to Scarclaw's side.

She started licking his wounds and face, murmuring words of gentle encouragement and hissed promises of revenge. Foxnose began cleaning his wounds. Even though he had the least of all of them, except Greyshard, he still had plenty to count as dangerous. Greyshard counted them: he had a shredded flank, covered in ripped fur and splatters of blood; his pads were grazed with sharp pebbles; his limbs lined with slashes, varying in length, depth and bloodiness.

Out of the corner of her eye, Greyshard saw Scarclaw raise his head.

He leaned up to lick Owlstar's cheek and they touched noses.

Another pang of jealousy hit Greyshard. It wasn't a bitter, half-fuelled desire. It was full-fledged resentment and greed. She wanted to have some cat to love so badly. But she would never. She couldn't have a mate who loved her, for who would love someone like her. She couldn't have the pleasure of seeing *her* kits grow up because she just couldn't. She couldn't spend time with family, for they were all living perfect, easy lives with Twolegs. The only family member she did see, spent all day cooped up in the medicine den, and ignoring her when they came out.
Greyshard tried to hide her growls and her feelings. She took a deep breath and stood up.

Then, a rustle sounded in the bushes behind her. three cats rushed into the clearing, fur bristling and teeth bared.

Word Count: 2185

Oof sorry it took so long!
I had a lot of school work to do and I went on a trip.
I enjoyed writing the end part of this. Hope you liked reading it!
Next updates will probably also be slow. Quicker than this I hope, but still slow.

Chapter 12

[image]

Rockpaw skidded to a halt in the dust, teeth bared and a growl rumbling in his throat. Blossompaw stopped just behind his left shoulder, fawn-and-white tail lashing. Treepaw trotted slowly in front of them, her vivid yellow eyes widening. Rockpaw stared in horror at the scene that greeted him.

His parents were on the ground, a few tail-lengths away. Scarclaw looked half-conscious, his coppery-orange eyes glazed with pain. Owlstar's breath heaved in her chest. It sounded, Rockpaw thought, like Blossompaw with a cough. Foxnose and Greyshard crouched protectively in front of them, snarling at Rockpaw and his sisters. After a second, they relaxed, and Rockpaw realised that Greyshard was the only one in the clearing without a scratch.

Treepaw stepped forward, and asked hesitantly, "Wh-what happened?"
Owlstar looked up at them and sighed, "Later... not now..."
Treepaw's ears drooped, and her tail tip twitched. Blossompaw rushed up to them and started to help them up. after Treepaw gave him a glare, Rockpaw grudgingly padded up to help. Treepaw went over to aid Foxnose.

With Greyshard bounding ahead of them as a lookout, the group started the slow, excruciating journey back to camp. Rockpaw let Owlstar lean on his shoulder, as she limped along the sandy forest paths. Every time she grimaced in pain, Rockpaw had to try his hardest to not flinch away. Just ahead of the pair, Treepaw led Foxnose along. Turning his head around fleetingly, Rockpaw saw Blossompaw as well as pulling Scarclaw to keep him moving. The tabby's fur was masked beneath a layer of slowly drying blood.

They had been walking for ages, when a shadowy, grey shape loomed out above them. Instead of feeling threatened and daunted, Rockpaw's heart lightened at the sight of the mountain. They were almost home.

Finally! Rockpaw thought, *Owlstar weighs more than a badger and Mousefoot is going to take me hunting at sunhigh. I can't go with a broken back!*

Once again, a scent tickled his nostrils. By now, it seemed familiar, even though he didn't know what it was. As his brain clicked everything into place, his pupils narrowed to slits. Slowly - very slowly - he turned his head to look at a low-growing hazel bush. A pair eyes were fixed on him, in a shade of a now-familiar-blue. A white muzzle poked out between the round, dull green leaves.

Rockpaw met the cat's gaze evenly. He was about to call out a warning to his Clanmates, but he hesitated. Something about the cat made him want to keep them a secret. He blinked slowly at the cat and continued to lead Owlstar along the path.

Soon, they reached the bramble bush that hid the entrance to their camp. In the shadows between the thorny tendrils, a shape stirred. Twilightear slipped out between the branches and stared wide-eyed at the group.

"Later, later...!" Owlstar muttered waspishly.

Twilightear glanced at Greyshard, who flashed a look over her shoulder at each of them in turn. She muttered something in his ear and the black tom rushed up to the brambles. Along with Greyshard, he cleared a fairly big hole for them to easily go through.
Rockpaw trotted along the rocks and moss. Shadows engulfed his vision, but he could make out the faint outlines of Treepaw, Foxnose and Twilightear in front of him. The black tom's silhouette faded, as Twilightear ran ahead, into the main camp clearing.

With every passing moment, the darkness in the tunnel was pierced with weak rays of orange light. When a dim golden glow surrounded Rockpaw, the tunnel opened up into the cave. He saw a few cats, mainly queens and elders, swarming around near the entrance to the cave. They gaped at the bedraggled patrol, who limped past Rockpaw. Twilightear and Greyshard shepherded the three wounded cats into the medicine den, leaving the gathered cats buzzing with questions and demands.

Rockpaw made his way to the fresh-kill-pile, scooping up a mouse in his jaws. He headed past the medicine den and leaped over the stream. Settling himself on the stump opposite the entrance to the apprentice den, he started eating the mouse. When he was halfway through it, Treepaw walked over. She slumped down beside Rockpaw on the stump and eyed the mouse.

Holding back a sigh of exasperation, he nudged the small, grey body towards Treepaw. She glanced gratefully at Rockpaw, before tucking into it. Rockpaw sighed, shaking his head. He leaped off the stump and pushed through the ivy curtain of his den.

He settled into his nest, grimacing at the cold, odourless moss that pressed onto his skin. He rolled around in his nest, trying to get comfortable. Finally, Rockpaw decided it was too hot and too early to sleep. He creeped out of the den and climbed onto one of the rocks surrounding the fallen oak. He tucked his pale brown paws under his chest and surveyed the camp. Tall-Leaf's new litter of kits were playing in the shallows of the stream. Crowkit, Frecklekit and Dovekit were splashing each other with water, exclaiming in loud mixes of delight and shock every time they got hit.

Rockpaw let the kits shrieks of laughter die away, as he cleaned his pelt. His thick fur was stained with Owlstar's blood. He scowled as its fowl taste bathed his tongue. He lay there on the rock for quite some time, half-asleep, until Mousefoot's call jerked Rockpaw back to reality.

Word Count: 918

Oof so sorry it took so long!
And that it's so short.
And pretty much uneventful...
Welp... school has started for me and I have a lot if work to do.
I was feeling uninspired but I wanted to get it out quickly.
The next few chapters will be much more interesting.
Have a nice day, guys!
Thanks for 100 followers!
Cya!

Chapter 13

[image]

Greyshard led the patrol into the medicine den, glancing nervously at each of the wounded cats. Foxnose came first, followed by Owlstar, then Scarclaw last. To put it simply, he looked horrible. His tabby pelt was matted with blood and whole body was twisted with pain. Crystalwing rushed up to them, her dull, blue eyes wide. She ignored Greyshard, who was hovering at the entrance to the den, and started to usher the injured cats to separate nests.

Owlstar nudged Scarclaw into a large, fresh-looking nest near the stream, and she pulled over a pile of moss to lay besides him. Foxnose collapsed into one a few tail-lengths away, his dark green eyes half-closed with a mixture of pain and exhaustion.

Greyshard bit her lip, as she pawed the ground nervously. She wondered if she should step in and do something, when Blossompaw stepped out of the herb store suddenly. Greyshard hadn't noticed the apprentice come in or go past her at all. The small fawn she-cat carried a large mouthful of long, narrow leaves and some leaves that looked like spiny maple shoots. She deposited them next to Crystalwing, who looked slightly impatient but proud at the same time.

"Ah...! Echinacea and goldenseal leaves - great for infection. Well done...!" Greyshard heard Crystalwing mutter. The calico leaned over hurriedly to pick up some of them, while Blossompaw padded quickly back to the herb store.

Echi-what leaves? Greyshard narrowed her eyes. She didn't know why her sister was so fascinated by herbs. They were just leaves that dirtied your fur. And giving them funny names would only make them seem more made up. Greyshard scoffed half-consciously.

Crystalwing's gaze shot up to stare at Greyshard, one of the maple-like leaves hanging in her white jaw. Crystalwing glared at Greyshard, before resuming her work.

Greyshard stayed at silent as she could, as she watched her sister and her apprentice work.

First, they licked each cat over, most probably cleaning their wounds. Blossompaw worked on Owlstar, while Crystalwing inspected Scarclaw with a look of increasing worry on her face. When Blossompaw had finished with Owlstar, she moved onto Foxnose. Crystalwing was still looking over Scarclaw, when Blossompaw had finished with the deputy.

Blossompaw opened her mouth to speak, but instead, closed it, and gathered up a giant wad of cobwebs. She started ladling them onto Owlstar's still bleeding wounds.
Greyshard drew her tongue over her muzzle, as the foul stench of blood wafted into her scent glands. She breathed out sharply through her nose and glanced swiftly at Crystalwing.

The she-cat was busying over Scarclaw, the pile of blood-drenched cobwebs growing ever bigger. Feeling a sudden urge to do something, Greyshard stood up. she padded over to Crystalwing, who barely reacted. she grabbed a corner of the cobwebs and started pulling.

Crystalwing froze and peered up at Greyshard. She murmured something that sounded like 'thanks' and started chewing some of the narrower leaves. Greyshard pulled the cobwebs out of the den, scooping them up in her paws every so often.

Most of the cats in the clearing had dispersed by now. The only cats that Greyshard could see, were Treepaw and Rockpaw next to the apprentice den, and Tall-leaf's kits playing in the stream. Out of the corner of her eye, Greyshard saw Rockpaw head into the den. She pulled the bundle across the small bridge and padded through the dirtplace tunnel. She walked backwards through the darkness, heaving breaths through her nose. She stepped into the pool of after-dawn light as the tunnel ended, and soft orange lights greeted her.

She heaved the sticky, red-and-white ball to the opposite side of the clearing, where she dug a shallow hole and dumped it into there. She scraped dirt and ripped-up grass onto it and trotted back into

the tunnel. Leaping easily over the stream, Greyshard walked back over to the medicine den. She sat down at the entrance, planning to make sure no-cat came in.

She heard Crystalwing's soft, supportive murmuring and the rustle of leaves and moss, coming from inside the den. She followed Mousefoot as the tom made his way across the clearing, from where he had been eating fresh-kill in a shadowy corner of the cave. He trotted in the direction of the apprentice den and stopped besides the stream. He called to Rockpaw, who was seemingly sleeping on a rock, "Rockpaw! Come on - we're going hunting!"

Rockpaw jerked up and padded sleepily towards Mousefoot. He jumped over the stream and followed Mousefoot out of camp.

Barely a few minutes had passed, when Morningheart rushed up to the medicine den. Three small, ginger kits followed her. She looked worried and rushed, as she demanded, "Where's Foxnose? Is he alright?"

Greyshard held back a sigh and answered, "He's fine - he's inside the medicine den. Crystalwing is tending to him right now." She eyed the kits, all of which were tiny, the sizes of young rabbits. As she remembered the kits being born almost a moon and a half ago, Greyshard meowed, "I haven't asked yet, but what are their names?"

The fluffiest one of them, the only she-kit, blinked her large, green eyes at Greyshard. She swished her puffy, dark ginger tail. "Who's that, mama?" She asked, turning to Morningheart.

"That's Greyshard, Risingkit. Grey-shard." The worry drained slightly from Morningheart's face, as she mewed proudly to her kit. Facing Greyshard, she answered, "Well, Risingkit here is the youngest, and the smallest, but she has the biggest mouth." Risingkit blinked slowly up at them again, looking slightly flustered but accepting. "The pale ginger tabby is Lightkit. He has the most energy out of all of them, he would stay up all night if I wouldn't pull his into his nest." At this, Greyshard chuckled and laid her gaze on the largest kit, a bright ginger tabby with a black patch on his chest and the base of his tail. "That's Flamekit. And even though he's the biggest and strongest, he's the most sensible one."

"They're all beautiful." Greyshard meowed, gazing at each of them in turn.

Morningheart nodded slowly, but shook her head and insisted, "Let me see Foxnose."

"I'm sorry, but I can't. It's too crowded in there." Greyshard answered, not meeting Morningheart's green gaze.

"Is papa in there?" Risingkit slid swiftly passed Greyshard and pushed through the spiny yew branches, "Ouchy!" She swatted one of the branches, when a ball of yew prickles hit her muzzle.

Greyshard gently grabbed the small kit's scruff and pulled her back out of the branches. "Sorry." She repeated, "But you can't go in. He needs rest, and that's final."

Morningheart breathed in sharply though her nose and inquired slightly derisively, "Well, can I at least know what happened to him, and Owlstar and Scarclaw?"

Greyshard paused, and wondered how Owlstar would react if she knew, that Greyshard had told a queen the exact truth. No. Better to wait for a confirmation. She decided to tell Morningheart the half-truth, "They were attacked by some rogues that were passing by."

"Oh! Well... Alright... then... Call me when I can see Foxnose, will you?" Looking a tad surprised, she padded away, her kits trailing slowly after her.

As the light seeping through the hole in the rock wall changed from orange to yellow, to white, the camp filled up with more and more cats. Some of them were returning from hunting, their jaws laden with hawks and rabbits. Others came back with apprentices, who either had sore muscles from battle training, or aching paws from patrols across the territory.

Greyshard sat there, in the cool shade of the yew branches, until sunhigh had almost came. All throughout, she had heard leaves rustling inside the den and gentle, yet worried voices whispering. All had been quiet for the past few dozen minutes, and Greyshard

felt her stomach starting to rumble.

She glanced back at the entrance and stood up. Pushing her muzzle gently though some of the branches, she saw Crystalwing gathering shredded herbs and cobweb pieces from the ground with her paws. She swept them into a large dock leaf and folded it, so that it was easy to carry. She started to move towards Greyshard. The tortoiseshell backed out and took the dock leaf from her, when Crystalwing had exited the den. The calico she-cat stared at Greyshard for a moment, before bowing her head and murmuring a thanks.

Greyshard padded away with the dock leaf swinging in her jaws. It rocked against her white chest, and its strong, pungent scent filled her whole mouth. She quickly looked at the nursery to make sure Morningheart wouldn't get any ideas. The only cats she saw near the Nursery, were all of the kits, and Silverwhisker. Her kits were playing moss-ball, bouncing the ball of bedding to each other, leaping high into the air to catch it. They were almost three moons old, but Stormkit and Pebblekit looked as if they could be apprentices.

Greyshard padded calmly past them, trying to avoid the large splashes of water that the kits threw up. she made her way through the dirtplace tunnel again, buried the dock leaf on the other side of the clearing, and returned quickly to guard the medicine den.

Right in time, Greyshard settled herself onto a bit of mossy ground, when Morningheart peered out of the nursery. She spotted Greyshard, nodded sulkily and backed back into the bramble bush.

After a short period of time, the medicine den filled slowly with noise. It seemed as if Owlstar had woken up, for Greyshard thought she heard her leader's voice. They, Scarclaw must have awoken as well, and Foxnose, because their voices joined in. Greyshard heard Crystalwing's questioning voice.

Greyshard realised, that they must be talking about the incident. She heard the occasional word, and finally caught on that they were near the end of the story.

Greyshard heard Owlstar's voice get a bit louder, and the she-cat say, "I had passed out - I... I lost a life-" Crystalwing gasped "- and Foxnose tells me that Greyshard rushed in, and chased off the she-cat, before she could... kill... anyone..."

The den was silent for a moment, as the whole cave seemed. Then, the sound of the kits brought Greyshard back to reality. She felt guilt slithering down her spine, like a snake, curling itself around her, ready to bite her. Greyshard wanted to tell them - she really did. But *what* should she say? 'Oh, sorry, I didn't actually save you. I was hiding in the bushes so I wouldn't get hurt, because I have three rogue kits to look after.' No. definitely not.

The branches next to Greyshard rustled, and Owlstar lead Crystalwing past her, towards the leader's den.

Crystalwing paused besides Greyshard and murmured, "Thanks for your help. Sorry if I came off as mean. I know its asking a bit too much, but could you please get some fresh-kill for Scarclaw and Foxnose. They're exhausted."

Greyshard licked her sister's blue-grey cheek and whispered back, "It's fine."

Crystalwing smiled and padded after Owlstar. They disappeared into the darkness, behind the curtain of ivy.

Greyshard trotted over to the pile and picked up a large rabbit in her jaws. She carried it over to the den, trying not to drag it on the rocky floor. She reached the den and pulled the rabbit through the prickly branches. Foxnose pricked up immediately, raising his head to look at the rabbit. Its grey-brown fur prickled Greyshard's tongue and her mouth watered at its sweet, juicy aroma, especially after the bitter taste of the dock leaf. Scarclaw, however, lay silently in his nest, eyes half-closed, his body almost completely covered in cobwebs.

It was right there and then, that Greyshard realised that Blossompaw was nowhere to be seen.

Word Count: 1922

Sorry that this took so long!
Most chapters will take some time, as I have school, so I'm really busy.
Welp, hope you like it!
I can't wait to write the next part (I don't know why xD).
Have a great day!
Cya!

Chapter 14

[image]

Blossompaw watched Owlstar and Crystalwing leave the den, her mother's face set with a determined resistance. She heard Crystalwing murmur something to Greyshard, who had been standing guard throughout the day. Her mentor sounded as if she was thanking Greyshard and asked for something to do with prey.

Then, Blossompaw got an idea. Owlstar wanted to talk to Crystalwing about something very secretive. Blossompaw could tell. The smell of secrecy positively buzzed around Owlstar's pelt. Crystalwing's as well. Though, the blue calico was more confused and nervous than grimly resolute.

As Greyshard's steps faded away, Blossompaw slipped out of the medicine den. She glanced back at her patients, before following Crystalwing's scent trail to the side of the HighMound. She heard the rustle of moss, as the two cats inside settled down. Then, Owlstar's voice, edged with worry, sounded out, half-whispering.

"I got the dream again..."

Crystalwing's voice replied, "Again...? How many times have you had it?"

"Since her apprenticeship... about one every quarter moon..." Owlstar mewed, "Each time, it becomes more and more vivid, until..."

"What?" Crystalwing asked.

"This dream... It was the worst so far...!" Owlstar murmured. After a pause, Blossompaw had to strain her ears to hear the next part, "There was a small clearing. Ferns and such. Full moon. Nice and quiet. But then the shadows started moving and swirling and bulging. They swarmed around me, and my ears were filled with screeches of cats in pain. Then it all stopped, and the shadows fell

onto me. Everything was dark, as if I was drowning. I could smell blood and fear on the air. Suddenly, a beam of light... and a flower... the darkness faded as the flower grew more and more... it went from a bud and curled out into a white flower, with smaller ones stemming off of it... I think it's her..."

"Yes... Maybe... But what *is* the darkness? What's going to happen?" Crystalwing's voice asked trembling.

"I don't know..." Owlstar confessed, before muttering half-angrily, "Those mouse-brained spirit cats can never give us straight answers..."

"Owlstar...!" Crystalwing scolded with only half of the enthusiasm she should have used.

Blossompaw wriggled her haunches to become more comfortable. She wondered what they meant, until it clicked in her mind. A white flower - darkness - light. Was *she* the one Owlstar and Crystalwing were talking about? *I did have a dream about... with a prophecy... so... maybe?* She thought. Then, she sensed something moving behind her. She smelt Dapplewind padding out of the elder den. Blossompaw took a few, quick steps away from the den and she quickly shook her pelt to scatter some of the herbs on the ground. She started to gather them up, pretending that she had dropped them, making her paws move as if she had just been walking.

Behind her, Crystalwing poked her head out of the den and murmured something to Owlstar. She ducked back inside and Blossompaw picked up the last of the herb leaves. She absently scraped at the ground, pricking her ears towards the den, but she couldn't hear anything.

"What are you doing?"

Blossompaw jumped and dropped the leaves on the ground. She whipped around to see Rockpaw standing behind her, looking confused but curious. Treepaw padded up to him to stand at his shoulder. Their mentors, Mousefoot and Wolflungs, deposited prey on the fresh-kill-pile, a few tail-lengths away.

"Um..." Blossompaw stammered, her voice suddenly losing its volume, "I... er... well..."

Rockpaw tilted his head, while Treepaw asked, "Are you alright?"

"I..." Blossompaw took a deep breath, before whispering, "I- I need to tell you something."

Her brother's dusty brown ears pricked up and he nodded towards the dirtplace tunnel, "If anyone comes in, we can say that we were helping you get rid of some old herbs."

Treepaw turned her striped head to stare at her brother.

"What?" he asked.

"No, it's just that you seem to have a very good excuse for sneaking out." Treepaw answered.

Rockpaw rolled his eyes, "Like what?"

Treepaw meowed smugly, "Well, there's today, while we were hunting, when you said you left a mouse behind, only so you could hide Littlepaw's catch."

Rockpaw huffed and mumbled, "Fi-ine. Yeah... sure..."

Treepaw grinned at Blossompaw and, glancing over their shoulders, they trotted towards the dirtplace tunnel, shredded herbs hanging from their jaws.

When the went through the dark tunnel and came out on the other end, they went over to the opposite side.

"So..." Treepaw began, "What's wrong?"

Rockpaw peered over to the tunnel then turned back to Blossompaw, looking expectant.

"Well..." Blossompaw meowed quietly, "This may sound really, well... weird and... hard to believe, but it's true."

"And...?" Rockpaw asked, before Treepaw slapped her tail over his mouth.

"I... I got a prophecy... f-from StarClan... from Marigoldpaw." Blossompaw whispered, staring at her paws.

Her siblings were silent and Blossompaw could sense that their minds were blank.

"She was a tortoiseshell... a bright gingery-red and black she-cat with deep orange eyes. She l-led me somewhere..." Blossompaw murmured.

Treepaw gulped, before asking, "Are you sure this wasn't a normal dream?"

"N-no. I- I was in the Twolegplace and it- it was so loud and bright and hard...! And then I went into a Twoleg den, and there were cats everywhere. They smelt of crow-food and Thunderpaths and Twolegs... There was loads of giant cat laying on Twoleg rocks. They were giant, and muscly, and powerful-looking. Then, I was thrown into darkness and Marigoldpaw's voice said '*When* the-" Blossompaw broke off as a fit of coughing seized her body. Her throat burned with pain and her body shook.

Rockpaw and Treepaw rushed to her side. They stared at her, seemingly unable to do anything about it.
Blossompaw's belly contracted and her wind pipe felt as if it was on fire. She choked on her breath and she faintly tasted blood on her tongue. It speckled the ground as she crouched down in pain, wheezing like crazy.

Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Crystalwing and Owlstar rushing through the tunnel. They barged Rockpaw and Treepaw out of the way.

"What happened?! What did you do to her?" Owlstar demanded.

"W-we didn't do anything! We were helping her get rid of herbs, when she started coughing!" Treepaw exclaimed, lashing her tail nervously.

"Yeah! She just started coughing!" Rockpaw repeated.

Blossompaw's breath rattled in her rib cage, and more blood splattered onto the dusty ground. Her legs shook underneath her, while she heaved a few more times. Trying to regain her breath, she straightened her legs, only to fall to the floor again.

Owlstar bared her teeth at Rockpaw and Treepaw, and Crystalwing started nudging Blossompaw. The fawn-and-white she-cat stood up shakily, gasping for breath. Helped by Crystalwing, Blossompaw padded back into the tunnel, across camp and into the medicine den.

Before her view was hidden by yew branches, she saw that the camp had become more crowded. Cats bustled around, eating prey or sharing tongues.

Blossompaw settled into her nest near the base if the stream, shaking slightly, throat burning.

Owlstar shooed Rockpaw and Treepaw out, before laying down in her own nest. Crystalwing ducked into the herb store and came out with a pale orange chunk of something, which dripped a golden substance.

"Honey," she whispered, laying the piece of honeycomb next to Blossompaw's nose. "Wait a moment."

Crystalwing grabbed a small ball of moss and dipped it in the stream. She dabbed her apprentice's muzzle and wiped the blood from it. She put it to the side and nodded towards the honeycomb.

Blossompaw lowered her head slowly, sniffed it, then licked it slowly. It tasted of... nothing really. But it felt nice as it slid down her throat. It soothed the aching skin, like water quenching a blazing flame.

As she closed her eyes and let her lungs fill back up with air, she pondered over the conversation with her siblings. When she was on the verge of falling asleep, she realised that Rockpaw had been distracted all throughout their talk.

He had been feeling... guilty...? Why? Blossompaw searched through her memories and saw, through Rockpaw's eyes, a red tortoiseshell body laying on a patch of dusty ground. The body was unnaturally still. Rockpaw along with Blossompaw circled around it, Skunkpaw's black-and-white fur edging their vision. As Rockpaw came to stand in front of the body, Blossompaw saw Marigoldpaw's empty, orange eyes staring up at her.

That day... before our apprentice ceremony... he was out and he found... Marigoldpaw's dead body...! Did he kill her...? That would explain why he felt guilty. But she was a 'paw and he was a kit... How...? Blossompaw asked herself silently. She opened her eyes, staring at the shadowing green shell of leaves around her.

After a few more licks at the honeycomb, Blossompaw stood up to help Crystalwing clean up the remaining herb.

Word Count: 1500
Again, I'm very sorry it took so long. I will try to get the next chapter out quicker.
And also, CHAPTER 10! Yay!
Hope you like it!
Bye!

Chapter 15

[image]

Rockpaw slid down the steep slope of grass. Dust puffed up to meet his face. Eyes watering, he skidded into a slow trot behind Mousefoot and Silverwhisker. AirClan cats padded in a loosely-packed crowd in front of him. Under a moon had past, since Blossompaw's coughing incident, and Owlstar stills scowled when she saw them near each other.

Rockpaw huffed, and gazed around him, admiring the gentle beauty of the territories. He glanced over his shoulder and saw, above the stinking dirt Thunderpath, the mountains of AirClan, glowing a faint silver in the moonlight. A warmth spread in his chest, as he saw his bountiful Clan's land in its night-time grace.

To his right, the river shimmered with stars, a StarClan cat's pelt stretched on across the lake, and beyond. The Prussian blue sky was littered with luminous pinpricks, all glowing with a pearly light, each allegedly, with their own story to tell. Rockpaw closed his eyes and breathed in the cool night air. It filled his lungs, tickling his chest, and a serene rush of air flew past him. For once, in this StarClan-cursed season it seemed, his skin felt fresh, his sandy-grey-brown pelt-

"Ow!"

Rockpaw's nose hit somecat's rump. He opened his eyes to see short blue-grey fur filling his vision. Silverwhisker leaped back, snarling, "Watch where you're going, you rabbit-brain!" Her green eyes blazed.

Mousefoot peered over his grey shoulder to sneer at Rockpaw. He muttered to his mate, "Ignore him, dear. He's such a badger-foot, you wouldn't believe it."

Silverwhisker whipped away from Rockpaw, and blinked lovingly at Mousefoot, murmuring, "Our three-and-a-half moon old kit are

better behaved than him."

"I know..."

Rockpaw let their spiteful comments fade away, as he flattened his ears to his skull. His fur started to bristle, but he forced himself to start breathing again.

*Why does Mouse*dung *hate me so much?* He wondered silently, wishing he could rake his claws over his mentors nose, just to show him how *badger-footed* he really was. He couldn't think of a single way *he* was badger-footed! He stalked rabbits without making the tiniest of sounds. He climbed up the Serpent Stones and back down, without disturbing a single snake. That Twoleg-breathed, fox-hearted, sap-brained piece of mouse-d-

"Rockpaw?" His mentor called out.

"Yes, Mousedung?" Rockpaw answered distractedly.

A few heartbeats of silence passed, before Rockpaw threw his head up and, wincing, corrected himself hastily, "Yes, Mousefoot?"

The grey tabby glared at him from a few tail-lengths away. He gestured ahead of them, and scoffed, "We're going to the Gathering. Or have you forgotten, like that time when you left whole catch behind and that fox got to it?"

Rockpaw's ears burned, and he stammered angrily, "That's not what happened!" He glanced around him and saw that most of his Clanmates had already dipped over the rise of the FiveHills.

With one last theatrical sigh, Mousefoot followed Silverwhisker's fluffy tail-tip down the grassy hillside. Rockpaw quickly ran after him, his ears still flaming. He leaped over a tufty patch of young ferns and trundled down the slope. His nose filled with the jumbled-up scents of the four other Clans. He tried to distinguish them as he dodged small, deep-set rocks. The cats that reeked like fish and damp moss belonged to LakeClan. NightClan cats were similar, but they had a stronger, more mould-like tang to them. SunClan always smelt of dusty bedding and fresh plant shoots. And finally, LeafClan

had a thicker smell, it was of the warm breeze and musky Sequoia bark, sometimes the faint smell of birds and feathers clung to their pelts.

A soft, gentle breeze brushed his thick fur, lifting it slightly. The full moon glowed brightly in the cloudless sky, spilling streams of light into the hollow. It was like a leaf at dawn, filled to the brim with gleaming dew. Rockpaw closed his eyes again, and breathed in slowly through his nose, and out through his mouth.

Noticing that he had slowed down to a slow walk, Rockpaw sped up, and finally reached the bottom of the hollow. The grass felt nice and cool under his sore pads. Mousefoot had insisted to Owlstar that he needed to start his tunnelling training. Nowadays, an AirClan cat would learn all three ancient WindClan techniques: hunting, fighting, and tunnelling. Rockpaw didn't know if he disliked tunnelling. Sure, it was hard work, but it was so satisfying to hear the *squelch* of mud under his dry paws, and to feel pride that he would help shape the future of AirClan.

As Rockpaw padded through the murmuring crowd of cats, he wanted to talk to one in particular. However, he sensed Treepaw watching him from a few tail-lengths away. He glanced at her, and blinked slowly, before he sat down next to Scarclaw a fox-length away.

There were four other cats around him, all warriors it seemed and all toms. So Rockpaw nodded respectfully, as he settled down into a comfy patch of grass.

"Ah, Rockpaw! I was just about to go and find you." Scarclaw meowed in a breezy tone, smiling gently. "These are my friends." He nodded at the large black-and-white tom with bright blue eyes, "That's Crookedspirit - a warrior of SunClan." Then, he gestured to the glossy black tom with deep blue eyes, the golden tabby with blazing orange eyes, and the dark tortoiseshell who looked grim. "Ottertail, Lionwhisper and Lynxfall respectively."

Rockpaw murmured a formal greeting to each of them, before returning his gaze to Ottertail. Quite shyly, he asked, "Do you know Silentbird?"

"Yes... why?" Ottertail replied, looking slightly surprised and suspicious.

Rockpaw flittered his gaze to Scarclaw, then answered, "It's just that you look very similar. Your eyes are the same shade of blue."

Ottertail paused for a moment, before smiling. He looked at Scarclaw, grinning, "That's one smart kit you have there." Turning back to Rockpaw, he confirmed, "Yes, I'm in fact her father. How do you know her?"

Scarclaw smiled back and licked Rockpaw on top of his head, ruffling the fur between his ears. He patted it down and replied to the large tom, "Well, me met at the last Gathering. My... um... sister introduced me to her."

"Really? Blossompaw or Treepaw didn't mention anything." Scarclaw meowed questioningly.

"Well... um... no, they probably didn't..." Rockpaw stammered. He didn't know what to say. What if they started to ask more serious questions?

"Excuse me."

Rockpaw jumped and whipped around.

Silentbird stood a few kit-steps behind him, her fur gleaming a bright coppery brown in the moonlight. Her eyes shined like the lake, deep and graceful. Seeing them next to each other again, Rockpaw could see the clear resemblance between father and daughter.

Ottertail flicked his tail and meowed, "Hello, Silentbird. How are you?"

"Good thanks," she answered. She gestured towards Rockpaw, and mewed in her light voice, "Blackpaw wanted to meet him."

"That's nice." Scarclaw meowed, nudging Rockpaw's flank with a paw, "Go on. It'll be nice to meet some more cats of your age."

The group of toms murmured in agreement, and they started to talk about prey, battles and what not again.

Silentbird meowed a farewell and started to pad away. Rockpaw called out a goodbye as well and followed her hastily.

After a few moments of dodging crowds of cats, Rockpaw asked innocently, "So... Who's Blackpaw? What's he like?"

Silentbird didn't say anything. Instead she quickened her pace. Rockpaw almost lost her multiple times, having to leap out of others' way or go the long way around a crowd.

Finally, he saw her waiting for him near the outer Southern edge of the hollow. Further up the hill, he could see the Twoleg path that SunClan cats use to get to the Gatherings. Silentbird flicked her tail and blinked slowly. Rockpaw ran the last few tail-lengths up to her.

"So..." He began, slightly confused, "Where's Blackpaw? What does he look like? What Clan is he from?"

Silentbird look at him, her eyes glowing with exasperation and... something else.

She meowed quietly, "Blackpaw...? He's a dark grey tom from NightClan."

Rockpaw looked around, searching the nearby area for any apprentice-sized grey cats. He couldn't see any. "Where is he?" he asked.

"It doesn't matter..." Silentbird answered, in a voice quieter than Blossompaw's on a good day.

Word Count: 1411
Phew! Sorry that also took some time.
Hope you like it!

Chapter 16

[image]

Blossompaw woke up in her nest, the moonlight filtering through the branches of the yew bush, casting silver pools of light on the stone floor. It was the night after the Gathering, and Blossompaw's feet still felt sore from trailing after Crystalwing, as her mentor talked to cat after cat. She squirmed quietly in the dusty moss, trying to get comfortable. However, even with her aches, her paws itched to do something.

As silently as she could, Blossompaw rose from her nest. She shook the scraps of bedding from her fur and glanced over her shoulder at the herb store. She could hear Crystalwing's soft breathing, and her mentor's blue-grey tail-tip flicked in and out of the den.

The fawn-and-white she-cat slid between the empty nests of moss. Just up to yesterday's night, Owlstar, Scarclaw and Foxnose had slept in the medicine den. Owlstar had claimed that they could go back to their normal duties, and that they were fully healed. Crystalwing agreed, however doubtfully.

Blossompaw ducked under the curtain of yew branches and looked across the camp. Everything was silent, except for the wind rustling faintly beyond the cave. She trotted softly along the edge of camp, springing over the stream when she had to. She crept into the dirtplace tunnel; its foul stench reached her from the first few tail-lengths. She reached the shady clearing and crossed it in a few bounds.

Carefully, she nuzzled and shifted one of the bramble bushes at the far end. Quite quickly, she noticed a small hole-like tunnel of tendrils pulled back near the ground.

A rabbit must have come through here. Dumb things. Blossompaw thought, shaking her head in half-laughter, half-exasperation.

She crouched down and pulled herself under the bramble bush, its

thorny branches grabbing at her long fur. Facing the hard, dry earth, she wriggle and pushed with her hind legs, until she straightened up on the other side.

Without the thick roof of pine branches hanging over her on one side, and precipitous rocky ledges on the other, the stars gleamed brightly between the shamrock-green tree tops. The moon, slightly waned, hovered peacefully in the dark, cloudless sky. Tall, widely-set pines surrounded here, their lower trunks speckled with moss, small bushes, and lichen. Blossompaw breathed in the calming, zesty scent of the pines. The sap that came from them had such a wonderful odour.

She padded along absently, dodging the thickest patches of undergrowth. As she went, she recited the healing herbs she had learnt so far in her head.

Goldenseal, echinacea, aloe vera, bee propolis, and marigold for infections. Juniper, honey, catmint, borage, sage and liquorice root for coughs and sore throats. Nettles, arnica leaves and cold water for swelling. Stomach and liver problems: elm bark powder, pumpkin, lyceum and-

Blossompaw's head jerked up as she distantly heard pawsteps ahead of her. A large moss-covered boulder sat in front of her, and, after a few heartbeats, a long-haired white cat stepped out from behind it. Their head was turned, and they were seemingly talking to someone else. Two, near-identical white toms padded out from behind them, and they stopped talking. The first cat turned around to look at Blossompaw.

"Greetings, Snowtail. Frosttail. Icefang." Blossompaw nodded respectfully to each of the warriors in turn.

The first cat stared at her, then smiled. "Why, hello there, Blossompaw. I see we're all night-owls, aren't we?"

"What do you mean, Snowtail?" Blossompaw asked.

"Rockpaw passed not long ago. He said he was going for a walk in the moonlight." Snowtail replied.

Blossompaw blinked at the fluffy she-cat, slightly confused, mind whirring.

Frosttail flicked his ears and meowed to his siblings, "Let's go back to camp, my paws are starting to hurt."

Icefang nodded and mewed, "Yeah, come on, Snow."

"Bye, Blossompaw!" Snowtail called, as she followed her siblings through an elder bush.

"Goodbye." Blossompaw meowed back, choking on her words slightly.

As Snowtail's long white fur disappeared, Blossompaw thought about Rockpaw. Why would *he* be out in the middle of the night? But then, why was *she* out? Blossompaw shook her head. She told herself, *It's nothing - he probably just wanted to stretch his legs.*

She continued with her walk, following a faint path through the forest. Mushrooms and mould popped up on tree stumps, and the wind whistled gently above her head. She breathed in deeply again, forgetting about Rockpaw. After at least an hour, Blossompaw was starting to feel tired. Her eyes flickered, paws ached even more, and her tail drooped.

Suddenly, she lowered her gaze to the path. A familiar scent tickled her scent glands. She opened her mouth and walked up to a bramble bush. There, latched onto a thorn near the bottom, was a tuft of sandy-coloured fur.

"Rockpaw..." Blossompaw murmured, touching her nose to the tuft of fur.

She started to wonder if it was him who made that hole in the dirtplace barrier. Probably. Where else would he have gone out of the camp, without alerting any guards? Why was he snooping around at midnight? Once again, Blossompaw reminded herself, that she too, was 'snooping' around. She sighed and walked away from the bramble bush.

Blossompaw spent the next few minutes wandering around

aimlessly. She followed a rabbit scent trail to a well-trodden path between a tunnel of ferns. Blossompaw stooped under them and let her fur brush the cool greenery. she took a deep breath and caught Rockpaw's scent again.

Honestly! If he is snooping around, he's doing a horrible job at it!

A strand of bracken directly next to her, had Rockpaw's smell on its tip. She inspected the ground around her, and saw some fresh, dusty pawprints lining the ground. Bending down to smell them, she heard a rustle up ahead.

Looking up, Blossompaw saw Rockpaw trotting breezily though the ferns. He had a smile on his face, and his pale orange eyes glimmered with cheer. They dimmed, however, when her saw Blossompaw standing in front of him.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"I-" Blossompaw began nervously, before gulping, and meowing back in a similar, yet quieter, tone, "I could ask you the same thing?"

Rockpaw scoffed, and, not meeting her gaze, replied sarcastically, "I was sharing a mouse with my imaginary friend. What do you think I was doing?"

Blossompaw started, "Well, I think yo-"

"I was out for a walk. It's bad enough sleeping with Skunkpaw snoring in my ear, but now, Littlepaw's on the other side. Together, they sound like a horde of badgers attacking the den! I don't know how Treepaw and Briarpaw can sleep through that noise!" Rockpaw ranted, shaking his head angrily.

Blossompaw's ear drooped slightly, and she asked, "Really?"

Rockpaw glared at her, before replying, "Why? 'You think I'm lying?"

"No, I just-"

"Typical..." he growled, and he pushed past her, grumbling.

"Rockpaw, I didn't-" Blossompaw broke off with a cough.

With a flick of his neatly-groomed tail, he was engulfed by shadows. Blossompaw stared after him, sadness spreading through her chest. She saw his orange eyes burning and his well-brushed pelt gleaming in the patches of moonlight, as he stormed away.

Wait...

Blossompaw focused on the picture of him in her mind. His fur, well-groomed, as it never was... He had no scent on him as he came back, except for the slight dampness after a grooming session.

Why had he cleaned himself like that? He never joins in to sharing tongues. And he's always so messy. Blossompaw took a deep, calming breath, and scolded herself. *You're over-reacting. That's all just Treepaw's gossiping - nothing else.*

She forced herself to believe that. She started to make her way back to the camp, following Rockpaw's scent trail, almost absent-mindedly.

Word Count: 1308
Wow, 2 chapters in one day!
Hope you like it!

Chapter 17

[image]

Rockpaw slipped under the bramble tunnel, his short fur barely catching on it. He wriggled his haunches through the last mouse-length and straightened up. Wrinkling his nose at the reek of the dirtplace, he quickly trotted across the clearing, and through the tall stone tunnel. As he padded along in the darkness, he silently raged in his head.

Why does Blossompaw have to be such a big-nosed badger, poking her muzzle in where it isn't needed? I don't know how anyone can stand her!

He crept between the rocks around the apprentice den and slid as quietly as he could, between the ivy curtains. Rockpaw slid between Littlepaw's and Briarpaw's nests, trampling slightly over the she-cat's moss. Her snowy-white ears twitched, and her eyelids flickered. Rockpaw held his breath, two of his paws hanging in the air. As soon as her eyes were completely closed, he stepped over Littlepaw's tail. With a large yawn, he settled into his nest, right behind the young tom. It was cold and dry, untouched for quite a bit of time, since before Moonhigh. Now the moon was three quarters across the sky, as he saw through the trees outside, and the sky was a cloudless navy blue.

Considering how tired and droopy her felt, he found it incredibly hard to settle down to sleep. In every position he tried, he was uncomfortable; either his paws were hanging out of his nest, or Skunkpaw's leg was skimming his flank. Over and over again, Rockpaw twisted and turned in the moss, trying to find a good way to sleep.

He lay there for at least an hour, maybe two, watching a spider in the corner of the hollowed-out tree trunk, weave its web. Finally, he managed to drift off to sleep.

He dreamed that he was perching on the edge of the lake, its glimmering sheen of midnight blue sprinkled with glowing stars.

Two bright moon floated in the centre, giving off faint silver glimmers. Then, the two moons faded into blue, and the grey dapples merged into slits. The eyes blinked slowly, and the stars swirled around to form a wide smile in the lake. The navy cat face stared up at him, baring its fangs.

Rockpaw took a step back, flattening his ears, also baring his teeth. The cat face rose upwards to be parallel to him, it licked its lips with its starry tongue. Rockpaw felt cool grass under his pads as he took one step back, two steps back, three-

His body was flung back, and darkness surrounded him, whipping at him like the wind as you neared the tips of the mountains. Around and around. Faster and faster. A searing pain pricked in his flank, and two orange eyes stared down at him.

"Wake up, you hibernating rabbit."

Rockpaw blinked a few times up at Mousefoot, raising his head.

"What are you looking at? C'mon - get up." his mentor snapped, flicking his grey ears.

Rockpaw blinked again, trying to focus on his mentor's face. How long had he slept? Not that long, as his paws still ached. But bright sunlight streamed through the vines of the den entrance. He muttered, shaking his head to clear it, "What... do you mean...? Where...?"

"*I* was going to go on a tunnel patrol with my apprentice, but turns out, that he's too much of a deaf mouse to get out of his nest." Mousefoot sneered.

As the words finally reached his ears, he slid out his claws, digging them into his moss. He forced them back in, tensing his back muscles to stop his fur from bristling. Mousefoot glared at him for a moment longer, before turning around.

He threw his last words over his shoulder, as he slipped through the ivy curtain, "I'll see you in the usual place. Just ne quick about it."

"Yes... Mousedung..." Rockpaw growled after Mousefoot's tail flicked

out of view. He curled back up into his nest with a deep sigh. With all the determination he could muster, he pulled himself out of his nest. The apprentice den was quiet, and all of the nests were empty.

Grudgingly, he shuffled out of the den, blinking hard in the bright sunlight. After his eyes had adjusted, he trotted across the clearing to the fresh-kill pile. In his haste, his paw caught a pebble and he stumbled into the stream. Grumbling, he shook his front paws off, and skipped over the small brook. He slumped next to the small hollow in the rock and reached out for a plump robin.

"I would advise you to hurry up, 'paw. Mousefoot looked in a right state."

Rockpaw froze wearily and looked up. A few tail-lengths away, Rosesong, Twilightear, Briarpaw, and Littlepaw sat together, sharing a rabbit. It was Rosesong who had spoken. The ginger-and-grey she-cat was looking at him, with a mix of friendliness and concern. She repeated, "You should hurry up. Mousefoot didn't look to happy. I'm sure he wouldn't want to be waited on."

Rockpaw sighed and nodded, meowing a quick thanks and rushing towards the entrance tunnel. He passed through it in a matter of seconds, with his paws rushing underneath him, and his tail streaming out behind.

The sunlight gleamed faintly on the edge of his vision. Looking up, he saw the Sun a quarter into the sky. It was way past dawn. Rockpaw followed a well-trodden track through the pines, his pale brown paws a blur underneath him. Taking long, wide leaps, he covered the distance between each tree with ease, on and on, until another, but much smaller, mountain's shadow loomed up in front of him.

He slowed slightly, his heart drumming wildly in his rib cage and breath unusually ragged. Through the deep green tree tips, he saw the half stony, half grassy mountain rising against the blue sky. Barely a cloud flew along with the gentle, almost non-existent breeze. Rockpaw slowed down to a halt and stopped in front of a thick hazel shrub, sides heaving. Through its leaves, he could see Mousefoot crouching besides a dark hole at the base of the smallest

mountain in AirClan territory.

Hesitantly, Rockpaw slipped passed the bush, as he tried hastily to regain his breath, eyes and tail drooping, Mousefoot watched him make the slow progress towards his mentor. Finally, Rockpaw came to stand in front of him.

"You ran here?" his mentor asked blankly, eyeing Rockpaw.

"Y-yes...?" Rockpaw replied, tilting his head slightly.

"Really fast?" Mousefoot inquired further, his deep orange eye widening a bit.

"Yes." Rockpaw straightened his back proudly, smiling at his suddenly friendly mentor, but panting all the while.

"Are you out of breath?"

Rockpaw started to nod, but he stopped, and stared at Mousefoot, narrowing his eyes. "No!" he meowed defiantly, just as his chest heaved again.

Mousefoot scoffed and turned around. He padded through the pitch-black tunnel and disappeared into the shadows. Rockpaw followed quickly, his paws feeling like they'll fall off any second. Through the darkness, Mousefoot's voice sounded.

"We're going to be continuing the emergency escape tunnel until sunhigh. Now that you know the basics of tunnelling, and you've tried it out of the training tunnels, you can help us today."

"*Us*?" Rockpaw asked, feeling his way through the shadowy tunnel. He felt Mousefoot's tail tickling his nose, which was always a good sign.

"Yes, '*us*'. Frosttail and Greyshard are going to be joining us." Mousefoot mewed.

Greyshard...? Great WindClan, no...! That moody fox-heart- Rockpaw began silently, only to break off as a wave of panic hit him. His nose had lost Mousefoot's tail. he whipped around, fur starting to

bristle, only to jump as a paw tapped him on the flank.

"We're going this way. Honestly, you should be able to know by now, which way is which." Mousefoot meowed irritably.

Rockpaw found his mentor's frisking tail-tip again and padded after him. With each step, the sucking darkness seemed to give way. At first, Rockpaw barely noticed it, but then he saw a pair of pointed ears showing against the walls of the tunnels.

"Where's the light coming from?" he asked.

"So you noticed? Well done. It took Littlepaw twice as long to see Twilightear." Mousefoot's praise echoed lightly off of the walls. He added, "There's a shaft up ahead, that leads upwards - it lets in light."

Rockpaw felt warm inside. His mentor had finally praised him, and not for being a forgetful badger. He nodded, then, remembering Mousefoot wasn't looking at him, murmured in agreement.

Soon, Rockpaw thought he heard some scrabbling from in front of him. He could see by now, a small tunnel leading sideways and upwards. Yellowish light poured from it, seeping like pale golden water into the tunnels. A few tail-lengths ahead of him, he saw a flicking pale ginger tail-tip peeking out behind the corner of the twisting tunnel. As they went further, Rockpaw saw Greyshard and Frosttail crouching besides a dirt wall. The tunnel ended abruptly ahead of them, and its earthy walls were lined with stones of all shapes and sizes.

Mousefoot nodded towards the pair of cats and called out a greeting.

Frosttail paused from his work and meowed, "Hey, Mousefoot. I see you finally made it." The white tom smiled.

Mousefoot replied, twitching his ears, "We would have made it sooner if there wasn't a dormouse in the apprentice den."

Greyshard chuckled wryly, not even looking up from where she was scraping at the wall. Frosttail grinned at Mousefoot, before

gesturing at the rubble piles around them. "Mousefoot, you can start enforcing the walls with those stones, ok? And Rockpaw, you can clean up the piles of dirt, alright? You know what to do - just push them into the gaps in the walls."

He turned back to continue his work, while Mousefoot immediately started rolling stones into crevices in the walls. Rockpaw watched him groggily for a few moments, his eyes still flittering with want of sleep. With aching paws, he started sweeping the piles of dirt laying around Greyshard and Frosttail, away. He scooped up pawfulls of soil and patted them into cracks in the tunnel.

After what seemed like his tenth pawfull, his eyes were starting to give in. Every few seconds, they shut, then bounced open again. He yawned widely, raising his haunches up high and stretching his front paws.

"Hey, watch it!" Greyshard swatted at him with her paw, claws unsheathed.

Rockpaw lurched back and straightened up. He turned from the pale tortoiseshell and rested his head on a comfy patch of dirt on the wall, as he scraped absent-mindedly at the dirt. He closed his eyes, breathing deeply. He relaxed his muscles and yawned. The rhythmic sound of scrabbling and rolling stones, along with a pleasant crumbling sound, filled Rockpaw's ears. His paws stopped moving and he started to drift off to sleep.

Slowly, the crumbling became louder and louder, and soft pieces of something fell onto his pelt.

This must be what snow feels like... Rockpaw thought dreamily.

Suddenly, something heavier landed on his pelt, and he heard the pounding of hurried paws.

"Rockpaw! MOVE!"

He squinted his eyes open, to blurrily see a bundle of tabby fur heading at him. Two unsheathed paws hit his chest and his flipped over. He landed on his back, and his paws tumbled over him,

causing him to roll onto his belly, through his head. The pain spread through his neck and to the base of his tail.

With flattened ears and a growl echoing in his throat, he stumbled up and demanded angrily, "What was that for-?" He broke off as the light from the shaft illuminated a bundle of fur spread on the floor of the tunnel, and a huge rock next to it. Piles of dust and earth lay scattered around it, and two pairs of eyes, one green, one blue, glowed in the darkness either side of it.

Word Count: 2006
Hehehe... Don't tell me I didn't warn you.
What?
The title says 'Chapter 13' and it's halloween soon. It would be a shame if someone died.
XD
Hope you like it!
Thanks for all the support and 199 followers! Only one more to 200! TYSM!! ♥□♥□♥□
Have a great day/evening people!
Bye!

Chapter 18

[image]

Rockpaw paced up and down the stretch of rock between the warrior den and the apprentice den. Treepaw laid curled up on the large rock beside the den, watching the large crowd of cats on the opposite side of the stream. As his sister flicked her tail nervously, peering over the crowd, Rockpaw turned his head from the murmuring cats. The fur on his spine bristled, and he couldn't help his ears from flattening to his skull. He no longer felt tired. Every whisker-length of his body felt like it was pulsing with adrenaline.

His stomach growled, but he didn't care. Or do anything about it. The bustle of anxious Clanmates was most literally standing on the fresh-kill-pile.

He twitched his ears, trying to block out the loud meowing of the cats. Suddenly, the sound started to die down, and a buzzing silence filled the cave. Rockpaw whipped around to see the crowd parting into half, watching... something.

A few seconds later, Owlstar leaped onto the HighMound and yowled loudly, "Let all those old enough to dig, gather under the HighMound for a Clan meeting."

No need. Rockpaw thought. *Those nosy fox hearts are already all there.*

He and Treepaw scampered quickly over to the meeting place. He squeezed in between Littlepaw and Briarpaw, who were both sharing worried looks.

As soon as they arrived, Owlstar blinked slowly, took a deep breath, and announced to the Clan, with a grim expression on her face, "As you probably know by now, many of our Clanmates have been injured in recent moons. I have been discussing the matter deeply with my senior warriors, and we have come to a conclusion. On every patrol, there will be at least three warriors and their

apprentices. If they have no apprentices, there will have to be at least four warriors. No-one is to go out alone, especially our younger cats. This is for your safety, "Owlstar added as Littlepaw glanced exasperatedly at Rockpaw, "There seem to be many dangers out in our forests: foxes, badgers, rogues, unstable tunnels, and-"

"Oh yes, on the matter of *unstable tunnels*!" A half-angry, half-worried voice exclaimed from behind Rockpaw. He turned to see Silverwhisker glaring at Owlstar, teeth bared and chest heaving. She demanded, "What happened to Mousefoot? Is he ok? You come in here with his twisted body, don't give us a scrap of information, and expect me *not to be worried*!?"

Owlstar blinked at Silverwhisker, and sighed, "He's fine, Crystal-"

"He is not fine! Let me see him!" Silverwhisker insisted angrily.

Rockpaw looked between the two she-cats, eyeing each one intensely. He saw a look pass through Owlstar and Silverwhisker, and his mother mewed, "Meeting dismissed. *I* will supervise in organising patrols for tomorrow, in a moment." She jumped down from the pile of earth and barged through the crowd.

She whisked Rockpaw's fur up as she passed him, her white paws barely skimming the floor. He pushed his way back out through the crowd and looped around. He didn't want to hear what Owlstar wanted to say. It wasn't worth listening to. He had much more important things to do.

He looked for a silver tabby pelt between the other pelts of cats. Ginger. White. Black. There!

Rockpaw nudged Wolflungs with a paw.

The tom turned around, his black striped fur bristling. He asked distractedly, glancing at the medicine den, "Yes? What is it?"

"I'm going out to hunt, ok?" Rockpaw meowed, the breath catching in his throat.

"Mhm. Sure."

"Thanks. See you."

Rockpaw bounded away quickly, before Wolflungs could notice what he had asked. He slid into the entrance tunnel and, after a few moments, ran onto the grass outside. Without pausing, he ran. It felt as if he flew over the ground, stretching his legs farther and farther each time. He dodged between tree trunks and patches of brambles, sprinting as fast as he could. After a tree-length or so, he turned left sharply, heading East.

When his legs felt as if they were made of stone, and his chest was on fire, he slowed down to a trot, then to a slow walk. He took multiple long, deep breaths, letting his nose fill up with the sweet smell of evergreen sap. Ahead of him, he could see the pine trees fading out and a hill rising up. Heart thumping, he sped up again.

As soon as he stumbled over the rise of the heather sprinkled hill, he collapsed besides a large rock. Shadows fell onto him, licking at his paw-tips and stretching a few tail-lengths away. Rockpaw wriggled his shoulders, stretched his front legs and flexed his claws. He tried to regain his breath, as his flank heaved up and down.

He yawned widely and stretched his neck, hearing the bones *click* gently.

Then, something hit him on the flank, and he was forced to roll onto his back. Looking up, he saw a pair of deep blue eyes staring down at him, and a grin lining a muzzle.

"For someone who's here to train, your not listening to me very well." she chuckled, jumping off of him.

Rockpaw scrambled onto his legs and scoffed, "I was just tired, that's all."
"Oh, *really*?" she asked, blinking at him.

"Yes, really! I was tired after out training session yesterday, and I barely slept. Then Mousedung woke me up early and we had to go tunnelling. The-" Rockpaw held himself back from spilling it all out.

"What?" she inquired, tilting her head.

"Well, you know, Silentbird, you being from a different Clan and all, I can't really tell you what's going on in my Clan..." Rockpaw muttered, shuffling his paws.

Silentbird stared at him, her black pelt glowing a gingery-brown in the sunlight. She murmured half-angrily, "Do you not trust me? I'm teaching you the secret moves of LeafClan, and you don't even want to tell me what happened down a rabbit hole?"

"No, no! It's not like that, it's just that-" Rockpaw stammered.

"What?" she demanded, eyes blazing with a mix of fury and sadness.

"I-I- well..."

"What...?!"

"The tunnel collapsed!"

Silence followed this.

Silentbird blinked at him slowly, her eyes wide and hollow. Rockpaw stared at his paws, tail bushing out and throat seeming to close up.

"I-I'm sorry- I didn't know- did he...?" she asked in an apologetic tone.

"No - he's in the medicine den with a twisted paw." Rockpaw replied bitterly, and added silently, *And it's all my fault.* A little voice answered him, *It isn't. He pushed you and he put himself in danger. You were fine without him.* Rockpaw nodded.

The black she-cat padded up to him and bent down to press her cheek against his.

"Never mind," he mewed, taking a step to the back, "It's ok. So... What are we learning today?"

She look at him solemnly for a moment, before her face cracked into a smile. She laughed, "Well, first off, you could learn some manners."

Rockpaw glared at her and leaped playfully towards her, paws stretched out. In the last second, she stepped to the side, and he landed on his chest and face.

She sniggered friendlily and nudged him up, "C'mon. I'll show you how to do 'the flick-over'. It was what I did to you, when you were sleeping."

"I was regaining my breath after sprinting here as fast as I could!" Rockpaw countered.

"I know. I know." Silentbird smiled back, and flicked her black ears.

She looked around and pointed her tail at the large rock. She explained, "Usually, we would climb up a tree, but because we don't have any around here, we'll have to use that rock - or any other tall thing we can find. In 'the flick-over', the main objective is to get higher up than you opponent and flick them over onto their back-"

"By landing on their back like a one-winged crow?" Rockpaw asked teasingly.

Silentbird looked at him seriously, then sighed. "No, not exactly. I would say, hmm, a 'fierce eagle' instead of a 'one-winged crow'."

"I beg to differ."

"You what now?" Silentbird stared at him, clearly confused.

Rockpaw's ears felt hot, and he muttered, "I heard Mousedung say it to another warrior, and..."

She grinned and finished, "You wanted to seem like a wise, ol' warrior and impress me with big words?"

"What? No!" Rockpaw exclaimed, shaking his head furiously. "Just show me the move."

"Please," Silentbird blinked at him teasingly.

The fur along his spine rose slightly, as he growled, "...*please*..."

She flicked his ear with her fluffy tail, and she walked past. She disappeared behind the rock for a moment, before reappearing at the top.

She crouched down on it and, with the sunlight streaming behind her, Rockpaw could almost only see her silhouette on the dark stone. "The trick is," she began, "to make yourself as small as possible, wherever you're doing it. Tuck all of your legs in and your tail and flatten yourself as much as you can to the place where you're hiding."

"Why?" Rockpaw wondered out loud. Then added, "Just so I know."

"So you don't cast any shadows or stand out against your hiding place, if your opponent looks up."

Rockpaw nodded, watching Silentbird intently.

She continued, "When your opponent is the perfect distance away from you, tense your muscles and leap. Always leap with your back legs - that leaves your front legs to be stretched out in front of you. Then, land with your front paws on your opponent's flank, but usually not their back, because that won't work. The momentum will knock them onto his belly, and you can pin them down!"

With that she scrunched up her body even more, then exploded into a straight line that whizzed through the air and landed neatly in front of him.

Eyes wide with excitement and shock, Rockpaw asked, "Could I try?"

"Sure!" Silentbird nodded, smiling.

"Afterwards," Rockpaw mewed as he started to pad behind the rock, "I'll teach you the Double Twist-Turn!"

Word Count: 1687
Yippee! I'm keeping up my streak!
Hope you like it!

Also, THANK YOU FOR ALMOST 1K VIEWS!!!
Have a great day everyone!

Chapter 19

[image]

Blossompaw quickly dipped another piece of moss into the stream and whipped back around to hand it to Crystalwing. The blue calico was leaning over a squirming tabby body, who lay stretched widely across a mossy nest. His paler paws were twitching in pain, while the back left one was twisted into a bloody mess.

As she looked up at Crystalwing, then down again at Mousefoot, Blossompaw asked in a tiny whisper, "W-will he be alright...?"

Crystalwing paused for a heartbeat from where she was wiping the dust, soil and blood from his leg. "I hope..." she replied in a voice that was equal to Blossompaw's.

"I-I'll get some sticks a-and... what else?" Blossompaw inquired, her fawn tail sweeping across the floor of the den.

Without looking up from her hurried work, Crystalwing muttered, "About two calendula leaves - remember what they look like? - and a couple of those sticks. As quick as you can!"

Blossompaw nodded and turned around towards the herb store. She half-tripped, half-skipped across the stream and faced the hollow rock. She saw herb pile after herb pile stacked up in neat rows. From shrivelled, brown stalks to bright green, giant leaves, more herbs than she thought was possible laid across the rock floor. As soon as she tried to picture what calendula leaves looked like, her mind went completely blank. She could hear Mousefoot's faint panting and the crowd of cats outside falling silent.

"Hurry up!"

"O-ok...!" Blossompaw replied nervously and eyed two piles of adjacent leaves. Her heart started to beat faster and faster, as she urged herself to remember.

One pile looked a bit like smooth daisy leaves and the other like wide bramble leaves. Blossompaw wracked her head furiously, digging her claws into the earth. She took a few deep breaths, trying and failing to calm herself.

"Blossompaw, hurry!!"

Calendula has flowers like daisies, doesn't it? So... leaves like daises as well? No...! Arnica has daisy-like flowers, so... Yeah! So this must be calendula!

"Coming!"

Blossompaw shook out her fur and grabbed a couple of the bramble-like leaves in her jaw. She rushed over to Crystalwing and stretched out her neck to let her mentor take them. Crystalwing took the leaves without letting Mousefoot out her sight, after less than a moment of chewing them, she spat them out with a yowl of annoyance.

"Blossompaw!" Crystalwing turned to her with ears flattened to her head. Her teeth were bared and she looked absolutely seething, something that was incredibly unusual for the usually calm Crystalwing.

The apprentice backed away, fur bristling slightly, and ears also folded backwards. She stammered questioningly, "Wh-what's w-wrong?"

"They're raspberry leaves! He's got a twisted paw! He's not kitting!" she exclaimed angrily.

"I-I'm sorry...!" she murmured, feeling her fawn ears burning.

"You know what...?" Crystalwing shook her head and muttered with exhaustion clearly lining her eyes and voice, "Sorry, but you're just in the way here. Go look for some more sage - Redsplodge has been having some serious stomach aches lately." More quietly, half to herself, Crystalwing added, "I hope you know what *that* looks like!"

"Oh- ok..." Blossompaw padded out of the den, without looking back. Her ears felt as if they were on fire, and her stomach seemed

to be pressing on itself. She felt sick, but not *that* type of sick.

She could hear Crystalwing busying herself with Mousefoot's twisted leg until the screen of yew branches hid them from view. Blossompaw slipped out of the den to see a crowd of cats gathered around the HighMound. Owlstar was standing to the side, talking urgently to Silverwhisker. A few tail-lengths away, she spotted Icefang and his siblings talking quietly, head-to-head.

"All this fuss over a bossy, old furball." Frosttail scoffed.

"Don't be rude!" Snowtail exclaimed, flicking her tail, "You were down there as well. It could've been you-"

"But it wasn't." Icefang interrupted, "Because Frost isn't stupid enough to jump under a rock when there was no danger."

"What do you mean, 'no danger'? I thought the rock was going to fall on Rockpaw!" Snowtail asked, tilting her head in confusion.

"No," Frosttail replied coolly, "The rock was no where near that lazy flea-pelt."

"Wasn't it?" Snowtail questioned.

"Nope. And to be honest," Frosttail mewed with a conclusive tone, "good riddance if it was - that nosy rabbit-brain would be no use to any cat."

Icefang murmured in agreement and, spotting Blossompaw looking at them, gave a small, fake cough. Frosttail turned and glared at her, while Snowtail simply smiled and mewed loud enough to be clearly heard:

"We were just saying we hope Mousefoot gets better soon! Rockpaw must be so stricken!"

She grinned awkwardly at Blossompaw and waved her tail in farewell, as she and her siblings trotted away. Blossompaw nodded back and stared after them, unsure whether to feel angry or sad or... something else. Her stomach turned again, and she had lost part of her sense of self. She sighed and looked around the camp.

A somewhat familiar movement caught her attention. She turned to see Rockpaw running out of the cave like a streak of pale brown lightning. Not that she had ever seen lightning, but she'd heard it from the elder tales as a kit.

Feeling a tugging urge to follow Rockpaw again, and with her stomach ache disappearing, Blossompaw slowly followed after him, at a much slower pace.

When she had reached the outside of the cave, there was no trace if Rockpaw, except for his scent trail and a few swinging furls of bracken. Slowly, almost casually, she trotted through the pines, stopping here and there to examine a patch of flowers for useful herbs. She followed a similar route to the night before, except she took a different path to the rabbit track away from the dirtplace.

As soon as she detected Rockpaw's scent on a long, overhanging tendril of bramble, Blossompaw sped up. She ran as fast as she could, while trying not to make too much sound or tracks. After running a few more tree-lengths, Blossompaw saw the pine trees thinning out.

A hill, dotted with pale heather, rose up in front of her. She pushed her nose into a patch of grass right between her paws and found Rockpaw's scent covering it.

Oddly enough, a tail-length away, a small bush of sage grew out from next to a small rock. Blossompaw remembered Crystalwing telling her that sage grows best in well-drained soil. A pang touched her stomach again and she continued walking.

Setting her paws down as lightly as she could, she crept up the hill. Using the heather bushes and rocks as hiding places, she tried to make herself as hard to see as possible. She reached the tip of the hill and looked down. She gasped.

Rockpaw stood at the bottom of a small hollow in the earth. Well, only for a few heartbeats. He seemed to have jumped, because his back paws only just touched the ground. A black cat leaped aside and jumped onto his flank, pinning him down. Blossompaw's ears flattened to her skull and the black cat threw Rockpaw aside and

ripped their claws over his flank.

Awestruck and panicked, Blossompaw bounded down the hill, and in a few seconds, landed on top of the black cat. One closer look told her that it was Silentbird. The she-cat' blue eyes darkened and met Blossompaw's copper ones.

With one fluid movement, Silentbird flung Blossompaw onto her back and leaped onto her stomach, holding her down with claws extended. Silentbird glared down at Blossompaw, teeth bared and glistening.

The black she-cat was just about to dig her claws in deeper, when Rockpaw grabbed her tail and pulled her back.

Blossompaw scrambled to her feet and stared at her brother, who looked as if he was helping Silentbird stand up.

"Wh-what are you doing, Rockpaw?!" Blossompaw demanded.

"Who's she? How does she know you?" Silentbird asked Rockpaw, lashing her tail. She tried to get to Blossompaw, but Rockpaw laid his tail lightly across her flank.

Rockpaw looked away, not meeting either she-cat's eyes. To Silentbird, he muttered, "This nosy furball is my sister..." and to Blossompaw, he snarled quietly, "I'm battle training, or is that against the Warrior Code, now?"

Blossompaw stared at her brother. Suddenly, her head filled with image after image, too fast for her to properly see. The emotions and scents around Blossompaw, filled her mind, and her head started aching worse then her stomach. She took a few deep breaths to steady herself and she looked up at Rockpaw again. Besides him, kneading the ground with unsheathed paws, Silentbird scowled at her, teeth still bared.

This she-cat in front of Blossompaw seemed like an entirely different cat from the one that she had met at the Gathering. Instead of a quiet, warm, juvenile warrior, there stood an angry, battle-ready rogue. Blossompaw couldn't help herself from asking

again:

"What are you doing...?"

Word Count: 1518

Sorry this took longer than I expected it to!
Still, it's a Sunday, so I'm technically not late with it (where I am).

I hope you like it!!

Thanks for all the veiws, votes and supportive comments!
You really make my day every time I go through them!

It would be very appreciated if you tagged anybody who you think will enjoy this book!

Thanks again and have a marvelous day!

Chapter 20

[image]

Her tensed shoulders drooped with disbelief when Rockpaw muttered something to Silentbird, not taking his eyes off of a patch of grass nearby. The black she-cat glanced at him, waves of surprise dancing off of her pelt. She nodded slowly and muttered a reply.

Blossompaw couldn't hold it anymore - the anger sparked at the tips of her long, thin fur - and she exclaimed, "Rockpaw! How can you break the Warrior Code like that? You know meeting with a cat from another Clan is against the Warrior Code! StarClan gave us the Warrior Code to follow! Without it, we're just a bunch of rogues! What would Owlstar and Scarclaw think? They'd be ashamed that you're going against the Warrior Code like that! If they-"

Rockpaw whipped around and flashed out an unsheathed paw, it skimmed Blossompaw's whiskers, not touching her muzzle, but it came close enough to shock her into silence. As she stared at him, dumbstruck, he growled, "I don't give a whisker about your sacred Warrior Code! And I don't care what those badger-noses think of me! All you do all day, is going around, yapping in your mousey voice, '*StarClan this, Warrior Code that*', and '*Oh, what would Owlstar say, yadda yadda blah*'! I. Don't. Care. So shut your fox-trap and leave me be! I've had enough of your whining and demanding. I don't care about breaking the Warrior Code, so just shut up!"

A heartbeat later, Blossompaw felt a rush of wind pass her flank, and she stumbled sideways, collapsing on her left flank. As quickly as she could, she staggered to her paws and turned to see Rockpaw's spindly tail disappearing over the rise of the hill.

"Wait! Rockpaw! Don't-" Blossompaw called after him, only to break off as a violent bought of coughing hit her chest. She felt traces of blood flow against her tongue, and she choked on her wavering breath.

The sound on a swishing tail caught her attention and she turned.

Immediately, and with a hint of shame, she remembered what the argument was about. Silentbird glared at her and bared her teeth slightly, narrowing her eyes.

"Proud of yourself, fox-heart?" she asked with a hiss.

"I-I- but I-" Blossompaw began, stammering.

"No, wait, let me guess, '*I was just trying to help him, so he doesn't hurt himself*'. Well, dream on, mouse-brain. No part of Rockpaw will want *your* help after what you did to him."

"But he was breaking the Warrior-" Blossompaw started.

"You know, he was right about you..." the enemy she-cat muttered loudly.

Blossompaw froze and whispered, "A-about what?"

"*You*... Such a nosy little cleanpaw! Telling on him at every chance you get!" Silentbird exclaimed scornfully.

"No, I don't, I..." Blossompaw paused, trying to regain her breath to normal, and asked quietly, "What about *your* parents?"

Silentbird looked shocked at the sudden change of topic. "What about them?" she demanded.

"I-if they knew, they would be ashamed of you! Meeting a cat from another Clan. Isn't y-your mother Pheasantstar?" Blossompaw inquired, trying to act as if she wasn't intimidated by the much larger she-cat.

Silentbird scoffed, "No! My mother's Branchbelly. And no- she wouldn't be 'ashamed'."

"How do you know?" Blossompaw pressed on.

"Well, first off, I don't need to tell you. But secondly, I will, just so you shut your mouth. Mustygrass - my aunt - said it would be nice if I 'bonded with a cat from another Clan'. So, I am." Silentbird explained bluntly.

Blossompaw gaped at her, "So your own aunt told you to break the Warrior Code?"

"Well..." Silentbird paused, glancing at her paws, before shaking her head and snarling, "Of course not! It's not like we're mates or anything! We're just training together."

"That's even worse!" Blossompaw meowed urgently, her tail flicked with irritation.

"Shut up!" Silentbird growled and jumped at Blossompaw. The black cat's paws hit Blossompaw's neck, and she fell back, pain rippling in her already sore throat. Silentbird stood on top of her, breathing heavily with rage. After a few moments of a heated stare down, Silentbird leaped off and bounded away.

Stunned, Blossompaw just laid there on her back, her pelt stinging in multiple places. She winced as she rolled over and stood up shakily. Her mind filled with flashing images, disappearing and being replaced heartbeat after heartbeat. All the way back over the hill, the images swirled in her head, like monsters roaring in an unending line of chaos. She barely noticed as see stepped on a strand of bramble and pierced her paw pad. Her head ached ferociously, and she couldn't open her eyes without being submerged in the whirlwind of memories and thoughts.

I just want to end this! She though, distressed and fur shaking, *Why do I have to feel like this? What's wrong with me...?*

"Nothing," a tiny, half-familiar voice whispered in her ear.

She froze and trod on another tendril of bramble, feeling the pain in both hurt paws. She whisked around, tripping and landing on her hindquarters. Blossompaw searched the undergrowth, sensing a chill creeping up her spine.

"H-hello...?" she asked to the seemingly empty woods.

A few moments past, and Blossompaw got up hesitantly, swishing her tail out of the spiky tendrils. She padded the rest of the way to camp with the images in her head slowing down, and pain easing

its strong grip on her head. Finally, when she was only a tree-length from the entrance tunnel, at the edge of a small clearing of bushes, one picture stuck frozen in her head.

Reality and memory merged, and Blossompaw saw a distorted image of a red and black body laying at her paws, the trees around the small clearing bending back to form a bigger one. Blood soaked into the dust and powdered up into the air, a bit like steam from morning due. The illusion shimmered out of Blossompaw's vision, and churning darkness covered it instead.

Once again, she heard Marigoldpaw speak the unnerving words:

"*When the lake's banks begin to dry, a new evil will arise, from the darkest bowels it shall strike, until the five put it out with a crashing wave...*"

The prophecy echoed in her head until the words flew away like butterflies on the breeze. The darkness unfurled and cleared itself. Blossompaw sighed and trotted through the bushes, willing for it to just be a dream. She wished for her to wake up as a normal kit, ready to be apprenticed without a prophecy handing over her head.

Oh, why, StarClan? What is so incredibly important about me that you give an apprentice a prophecy...? What could I possibly do?

She let her ears relax and her thoughts wondered to Rockpaw, as she sensed his smell on a frond of bracken nearby. She shook her head and started reciting herbs to take her mind off of it.

Herbs!

Blossompaw suddenly remembered Crystalwing's request for more sage. The fawn she-cat turned and retraced her steps as fast as she could back towards the patch of ferns. She grudgingly reminded herself that there must be some closer, but she couldn't waste anymore time.
With barely a whisker-worth of breath in her lungs, she found the small, pale green shrub. Carefully, Blossompaw nipped a few stems from the bottom, as Crystalwing had taught her.

'The more herbs you have, the safer you are.'

She left enough for the plant to grow properly, and hurried back towards camp, crisscrossing the scent trails once again.

So. Much. Running. She thought, paws flying over the ground. *Must keep. Huff. Running.* She forced herself onwards. *Don't. Give. Up. Come on!* She finally came to the edge of the trees, legs trembling with limitless exhaustion. She tried to stand straight andd unwavering as she padded through the tunnel and into camp.

Word Count: 1315
Meh, I have writer's block. No inspiration-

Anyways, hope you like it!
TYSM for 1K veiws!

Oh, and, Happy Halloween!

Chapter 21

[image]

Greyshard paced around the mouth of the tunnel, flicking her tail with impatience. Not far behind her, Flamepelt and Skunkpaw were discussing group hunting strategies. Greyshard heard snippets of their conversation, "...keep it surrounded at all times..." and "...keep your eyes on the prey and the leader...". She sighed and stared down the twisting tunnel, the crevices and crags lining its walls at irregular intervals were inky black, as was the rock a few fox-lengths down.

She had always wondered how the tunnel had gotten there. The elders, or at least the Clan born ones, had told her as an apprentice that it was ancient Twolegs. That they came here to carve 'special rocks' out of the mountains. Or something like that anyway. They wriggled like moles and rabbits down here with giant rock claws and dug out the hollow and about half of the tunnels in the territory.

When Greyshard had asked why the tunnels were so small, Redsplodge had replied something like, "Oh, Grey, dearie, use your head, how should I know? The Twolegs are stupid and nothing they do makes sense." And then, Fireburst, her mate, had added, "I assume they wanted to hide the tunnels from other Twolegs, the selfish mouse-brains they are." The elders had laughed and Greyshard had sulkily padded out of the den.

Suddenly, something caught her eye in the shadowy depths of the tunnel. She stood up and stared into it. After a few moments, she called to Flamepelt and Skunkpaw, "We can go now." and as the figure in the tunnel was no more than two tail-lengths away, she added scornfully, "The amazing Rockpaw has decided to bless us with his presence."

The dull brownish shape hissed and Rockpaw stepped out of the rocky entrance. He looked out of breath and agitated, barely able to stop his tail from lashing and his ears from flattening. He glared at

Greyshard with his pale orange eyes, in the same way Owlstar had glared at him. Greyshard smiled slightly and turned to beckon Flamepelt and his apprentice towards the tunnel.

Rockpaw stared at the passing cats blankly, until Greyshard asked silkily, "Well. Are you planning on joining this patrol or not?"

He just gazed at her and finally inquired, somewhat sarcastically, "Isn't Mousefoot going to slow us down if we take him along?"

She scoffed and replied, "Mousefoot isn't going. Obviously," she added, rolling her eyes. "I'm leading a hunting patrol around the South-Easter border. If you decided that you don't want to go, go tell Foxnose and Mousefoot. I'm sure Crystalwing would appreciate being disrupted by a moss-headed apprentice."

Flamepelt curled his tail nervously and nosed himself between them. He meowed gently, "Greyshard, calm yourself, Rockpaw was just a few minutes late, and he hasn't said anything about not wanting to come."

Rockpaw blinked at Flamepelt and shot a smug look over the tom's shoulder at Greyshard. Her blue-grey tail lashed, hitting Skunkpaw in the nose.

"Ouch!"

She rolled her eyes again and whipped around to face the tunnel. "Let's go then - we're wasting sunlight." she meowed, as she ducked underneath the sharp ridge of rock at the top of the entrance.

After about a minute of walking in the darkness, Greyshard came out of the tunnel and slid under the bramble bush at the mouth of it. She blinked a few times to get used to the bright, harsh sunlight. After waiting for the rest of the patrol to come out, she started walking through the forest, heading for the lower corner of their territory.

Not long after, she heard a rustle and a flash of brown fur like tiny lightning. She raised her tail as a signal for the rest of them to stop and crept up to a giant patch of golden-brown bracken. Greyshard

nodded to Flamepelt and signalled to the tree just behind the bracken patch. He dipped his head and slowly slid up behind the tree.

In a heartbeat, he jumped into the bush and a rabbit fled out of it, stamping into the dust wildly. It skid to a stop right in front of Greyshard, just as she pinned it down and snapped its neck with one clean bite. It fell limply in her claws; its large black eyes open wide.

"Thanks Flamepelt," she smiled, feeling some of the anger melting off and down her pelt, as if she had just climbed out of a stream and was warming herself in the sun.

He nodded, smiling back and meowed to the two apprentices, "And there you have it - a perfect example of group hunting! I hope you learned something from that!"

Skunkpaw nodded vigorously, still staring at the rabbit, while Rockpaw yawned and made a noncommittal sound.

Greyshard held back a scoff. Instead, she announced, "Let's go farther down into the territory."

"Maybe near the Twoleg farm?" Flamepelt suggested, "Nobody's hunted there for days."

Nodding, Greyshard buried the rabbit in a spongy patch of moss and pine needles and led the patrol further down the territory. For a good amount of minutes, she followed an unused rabbit track through thick walls of ferns, before stopping in a small clearing, that positively over-flowed with prey.

She turned and murmured to the hunting patrol, "Let's split up. Flamepelt you go in that direction, towards the barley field." She pointed her tail South. "Rockpaw and Skunkpaw, can you stay in this area? And I'll go further East, towards the border. Is that fine with everyone?"

They all nodded and rumbled agreement, except for Rockpaw. He, for a change, didn't look rebellious and obnoxious, but rather,

curious and half confused.

"Weren't we supposed to stick together? I thought Owlstar said that we have to keep each other in sight or something?" Rockpaw asked, flicking his ears.

Greyshard felt a sudden urge to claw at his ears. She took a deep breath and replied smoothly, "You'll be fine. I doubt any tunnels will be falling onto you from the trees." Flamepelt took a quick, whistling breath. "And if you do get into trouble, perhaps with a giant squirrel, then all you have to do, is yowl at the top of your lungs and hope by StarClan that we hear." She smiled, somewhat friendlily.

"Let's meet back here in... let's say... just past sunhigh?" Greyshard added.

The patrol nodded. Rockpaw dipped his head and led Skunkpaw into the clearing. The two warriors waited for a few moments, before they heard a quickly-cut-off bird call. Flamepelt smiled and meowed a farewell to Greyshard as he departed. She called back and started to trot in the other direction.

When she made sure that all of the patrol was at least two tree-lengths away from her, she started running. After another few tree-lengths, she stopped, panting slightly. Greyshard sniffed the air, opening her mouth to let the scents of prey enter it. Soon, she detected the scent of a rabbit.

Slowly, Greyshard looked around, scanning the undergrowth nearby for any signs of it.

I wonder how...? She though, still searching for the rabbit, How the ancient WindClan travellers survived in such territory. A frond of fern rustled nearby. I thought they were used to giant moorlands and rolling hills, not... this! Pine forests and Twoleg farms. Ha! That sounds like ShadowClan! Greyshard chuckled silently as she circle the ferns. I guess we've gotten used to it, but still. It's weird to think that AirClan is anything like ShadowClan, or NightClan. Greyshard peeked through the long, sharp-edged grass at the patch of ferns.

Suddenly, the rabbit stood up on its hind legs, its front paws lying on its chest in an almost adorable way. Greyshard tensed her muscles to leap but was momentarily frozen by the how the rabbit looked like. It's short fur was a light greyish-brown with surprising hints of blue-grey and weird white splotches on its under-body. Its large, glassy black eyes blinked slowly, and its huge nose wrinkled like crazy as a dandelion leaf disappeared into its mouth. It blinked a few more times, and hopped a couple of steps towards Greyshard, stopping no more than a tail-length or two away.

Stupid, dumb, adorable thing. Why does prey have to this cute sometimes?! Greyshard demanded silently.

She leaped and landed on the rabbit's back. It didn't struggle much, to Greyshard's surprise, but it flicked it paws around, batting Greyshard's legs. Then it feel flopped onto the grass, unmoving, as Greyshard bit down on its throat. She grabbed its scruff and started to pull it away.

Soon after, she saw a thick copse of out-of-place oaks, surrounded with elder bushes and bracken. She turned around, the easier to pull the rabbit past the bushes. Glancing behind her every so often, she backed through the undergrowth and into the clearing.

Greyshard straightened up on the other side, flexing her shoulders and neck. She shook out her pelt, and, with the rabbit lifted as high as she could, she turned around.

The sight that welcomed her was not a good one. Not at all.

With a dull thud, the rabbit fell to the ground, sprawled unnaturally on the ground. The grass around its pierced neck fur gleamed red with blood, just like the grass a fox-length away.

Word Count: 1523

Yes! I'm keeping my update streak!

Hope you like it!

Chapter 22

[image]

Greyshard felt as if she'd never breath again. An icy claw grabbed her throat and her stomach flipped and squirmed.

"N-n-no..." she choked out, feeling her breath catch in her throat.

Her legs trembled and she felt her heart twist, a feeling she had never experienced before.

But then, she'd never had any reason to feel like this.

The unfathomable grief overwhelmed her, as if a dam had broken in her chest, spilling a monstrous wave of water onto her heart.

She gasped and stared at the tiny body barely a fox-length in front of her. Greyshard then looked up to meet the pair of slightly-surprised, but mostly satisfied, water-blue eyes. A grin spread slowly across a white muzzle and blood-soaked teeth bared themselves into a spiteful snarl.

"Well, well, well, you must be his mother. How nice of you to abandon your kits just like that in the middle of a forest. Don't you know that there are vicious Clan cats out here?" the blue-eyed cat asked innocently, sneering all the time, as she met Greyshard's eyes.

"V-v-vic-cous...?" Greyshard sobbed quietly, glancing back down at the crumbled brown-and-white patched tabby body.

Patch lay under the she-cat's claws, pinned down by his chest. His claws were unsheathed in his tiny white paws and his mouth was wide open in a cry of, what looked like, pain, fury and fear. His hazel eyes stared blankly ahead, as if they were simply pieces of dry moss, nothing else. When a beam of sunlight flooded the clearing, his pelt shined a bright white and brown, looking like it was freshly cleaned and glossy, while the blood smeared and seeping from it glistened happily.

"P-P-Patch... n-no...! I-i-it c-can't-t... no..." Greyshard stammered, trying to steady her breath and flatten her shivering fur.

"Patch you say? Brave little rat he was." Scoffed the she-cat, flicking her tail with amusement. "Attacked me without thinking twice, the dumb, human-headed furball."

"Who... who a-are you...?" Greyshard asked, feeling the heart-stopping grief being corroded away with something else.

"Me?" asked the she-cat, as if it was the weirdest question to be asked. "I'm Darkness of Leaf, but I guess you can call me Dark." She smiled and blinked, yawning widely.

How can she dare to act so coolly after she just ki- did th- Patch- I-I... I... Greyshard gulped, closing her eyes tightly, willing it to be a dream.

"The real question - or *questions* - are: Who are *you*? And should I consider killing *you* as well? Afterall, you Clan cats are pure blabbermouths, always running off to snitch on others."

Greyshard looked up suddenly, surprised how genuine and annoyed this 'Dark' sounded. She was shocked into replying, "I-I'm Greyshard."

"Ah, Greyshard... Hmm... Greyshard, Greyshard, Greyshard." Dark repeated, looking deep in thought. "Ah, yes! Greyshard - that moody, snappy one that hates Rockpaw, grew up with her best friend being a dog and can't have kits. Isn't it?"

Greyshard stopped breathing for a second. How would a rogue know something like that? Those were some of her darkest secrets! Well, except for the first one, but, how...? The fur on her spine spiked up and her claws unsheathed themselves instinctively.

Noticing this, Dark twitched her ears and meowed, "I wouldn't advise fighting me. That is - unless you don't want to end up like 'Patch' or that tortoiseshell you found dead by the human farm. You probably will anyway though, so, honestly, I'm fine either way. It's not that I don't *like* killing cats for a cause - it's just that I absolutely

hate it when Drip makes me be so conspicuous about it. Telling me to leave the bodies there for a few days, then throw them into the river. Bleh. Servant work. And just plain stupid." Dark licked her unsheathed paw, lifting it from Patch's body, causing him to limply roll onto his side. She kept her deep blue eyes on Greyshard throughout, smirking and her brown tail-tip twitching.

Greyshard didn't know what to think anymore. How many cats had this she-cat murdered? Who was this Drip that was... ordering her to kill cats? And what were these 'humans'? Her head whirled, and her legs trembled again.

"Tired are we? Heh. It'll make the job easier for me." Greyshard heard Dark murmur half to herself. She saw the she-cat's curiously brown tortoiseshell pelt shake and then fly through the air, getting bigger.

Pain seared through Greyshard's nose and chest, like fire racing down her fur. She felt claws pierce her skin and rip at her fur. They grabbed at her throat and muzzle, and another pair lashing at her hindquarters and stomach. Her paws felt like they were made of stone - she didn't have the energy or willpower to move them. Something warm spilled over her fur and something like thick red rain started to obscure her vision. Agony gnawed at her body, her muscles screaming with it.

Then the claws loosened their hold and the pain ceased, but only a little. The warm liquid on her flank and head kept flowing, but it lessened and Greyshard managed to stumble up into a crouch. When she tried to open her eyes, they stung and burned, as if she was trying to open them underwater. She blinked frantically, trying as hard as she could to regain the ability to see.

Finally, she could, and she wished she didn't. A shape that resembled Flamepelt was squirming weakly under Dark, and Skunkpaw's was crouched next to Rockpaw's, which was barely moving.

Greyshard pushed herself to her feet, only to fall back down, causing her head to flash with pain again. She coughed a few times and started to gain control over her fading breathing.

Suddenly, a rush of wind soared over her, along with a pure white smear of fur. It leaped at Dark's smudged figure and slammed into her, knocking her off of her paws. She was limp, before she started struggling as the white shape buried its muzzle into her throat and she opened her white jaws to yowl with pain.

Only, Greyshard didn't hear anything over her thumping heart and the roaring blood pounding in her ears. She was nudged gently and rolled into a crouch. A brown shape hurtled over to Rockpaw and Skunkpaw, pulling them into standing positions. With a gasp of pain, Greyshard was hauled onto her paws by a pale tortoiseshell figure, who she soon recognised as Rosesong.

"It's ok. Just breathe. The rogue is gone. Frosttail chased her off. Breathe, Greyshard." Her voice whispered into Greyshard's ear.

The thundering of noise settled down and Greyshard gathered enough strength to stand by herself. She looked around, blinking slowly to clear her eyes of the blood and dirt.

Treepaw was licking Rockpaw's face, cursing him in a high-pitched voice. Skunkpaw hovered nearby, hunching his shoulders and shivering. Flamepelt was struggling to his paws, wincing and licking at his fresh wounds. Frosttail was on the other side of the clearing, staring at something on the ground with a lashing tail. Owlstar padded up to him, followed by Wolflungs. They all stared at the same point for a moment, before looking at each other.

Rosesong trotted over to them, looking curious, but a look of horror crossed the she-cat's face. Her dark green eyes were wide, and her claws dug into the ground. She turned back to Greyshard and then to Owlstar, murmuring something Greyshard couldn't hear.

Greyshard looked around at the rest of the clearing, her head still spinning. Blood was splattered over the grass and the rabbit still lay on the ground nearby. The tall barrier of elder bushes and oaks towered around them, casting green shadows and golden light onto the clearing. Thick patches of ferns speckled the edges of it. One of them rustled, and a pair of short-eared brown rabbits peeked out of it.

As Greyshard's vision cleared and went back into focus, she saw the distinct swirling stripes and bright gingery-brown pelt of two familiar kits.

"Taffy! Coco!" Greyshard exclaimed, leaping to her paws, all tiredness and pain gone. She bounded over to the two kits, who had only just stepped out of an abandoned rabbit hole, and wrapped herself around them, blocking them from the other cats' view. She licked the tops of their heads furiously, her heart thrumming with joy at seeing them alive. Then, it slowed down again, and the air was squeezed out of her lungs. She breathed in shallowly and buried her muzzle in the two kits. They squirmed around, bigger than Greyshard had remembered them to be.

Coco pushed Greyshard's muzzle back with a paw and asked, peering around Greyshard's ear, "What's going on, Grey? Who are they?"

Taffy glared at something over Greyshard's shoulder and leaned away.

Quite suddenly, a paw tapped her on her back, and Greyshard sat up, turning around.

Owlstar stood behind her, her yellow eyes wide and surveying. "What," she demanded, "Has happened here?"

Word Count: 1525
Oh my- I literally can't believe that I'm almost at 300 followers, and that I have 1.2K+ views on this book! Thank you so much guys!!!

I hope you enjoy reading it!

Thanks again and have a wonderful day <333

Chapter 23

[image]

With Treepaw breathing in his ear, Rockpaw crept up to the entrance of the medicine den, keeping low to the ground. The cave was bright and yellowish light glowed at the hole in the wall. Rockpaw ducked stiffly under the branches of yew and shuffled between the rocks of the apprentice den. Surprisingly enough, he had never been here before, between the medicine den and the apprentice den. The narrow gap was bordered by spiny branches on one side and boulders on the other.

Voices echoed to their right, as cats from inside the bush were talking. He heard a kit yowl from far behind them and he recognised Risingkit's hungry voice. A sudden sneeze made Rockpaw jump, and he swirled around to glare at Treepaw. She stared back at him, wrinkling her nose and ducking her head under an earthy root that hung overhead.

"Sorry," she whispered, glancing at the yew bush.

Rockpaw sighed and flicked his tailing, turning back around, "It's ok, but try to hold it in next time."

They scuttled farther into the gap and squirmed around to face the yew branches. When one poked Rockpaw in the eye, he almost squeaked in pain, but Treepaw nudged him sharply with her paw. He nodded at her and flattened himself to the ground, staring through the green shrub.

He shifted his body slightly, experimenting with the gaps in the branches, to see which one would give a better view. He finally settled into a half crouch, perching awkwardly on his toes, peering into the bush.

Inside, he could see two different shapes moving around, one light brown and one calico. He spotted his mother's distinctively bright eyes flashing and heard her voice meow angrily.

"... and how did you even get these kits?! They look nothing like you and Crystalwing told me that you're-"

"Sterile... yes... I know...!" Greyshard's voice interrupted. Rockpaw almost jumped out of his fur when he saw her blue-grey pelt moving from barely a tail-length in front of him.

Owlstar paused and stared at Greyshard, before continuing to pace and hiss disbelievingly, "Why didn't you tell me? It would have been so much easier if you just told me!"

"I- don't know..." Greyshard tucked her legs into her body.

Crystalwing spoke up, her voice unusually harsh, "You could have told *me*! We *are* sisters! And I could have helped you, well, help them! How did you feed them when they were new-born...s? Wait... You were taking the borage leaves , weren't you? Greyshard, I swear-"

"I had to! I couldn't let them die! Not after Whisperbreeze..." Greyshard stood up suddenly, causing the branches to rustle around Rockpaw and his sister.

"Whisper*breeze*?!" You gave them a warrior name! And who even is that?" Owlstar demanded, the familiar tone of pure fury rising in her voice.

Greyshard winced and looked at Crystalwing, but the calico glanced away, shaking her head.

"She... she's their mother... she was a kittypet who ran away after her Twolegs tried to take the kits. They were barely a week old when I found her near the MoonRock hollow. She was exhausted and tired and half starved. As were the kits. I-I came back every day with prey for her, but it wasn't enough..." she choked on her words, "And when they were a moon old, she died. B-but before that, she told me to tell her about the Clans and the Warrior Code, because she- she said- t-that she wants to go to StarClan when she dies... Then I took care of them... I weaned them as soon as I could and told them about the dangers in the forest, and- and then- Patch died and I-" Greyshard broke off and stared down at her paws.

Crystalwing looked up, eyes wide and swirling with emotions. She padded up to Greyshard and layed her head on her shoulder.

Owlstar sighed deeply, closing her eyes.

Treepaw turn to look wide-eyed at Rockpaw. He felt the same way. How could all of that happened without any of the Clan knowing? As the Owlstar shuffled towards Greyshard, Rockpaw edged to the side, the better to see her.

He froze as Owlstar's gaze fixed on a place near Rockpaw and Treepaw, but it passed over their hiding spot and returned to Greyshard.

He heard her sigh, ready to speak, but a small voice interrupted her.

"So, Grey isn't our mum?"

Rockpaw thought he would faint of fright right there and then. A small, gingery-brown cat climbed out of a pile of moss on the other side of the branches, just in front of Rockpaw. He heard Treepaw scoff and he glared at her.

Another voice meowed and a strangely-patterned brown tabby scrabbled out of the nest as well, "Why didn't you tell us, Grey?"

Greyshard looked up bleakly and murmured, "You're kits... Why would I ruin your lives by telling you that...?"

"Still..." Owlstar muttered, her tail swishing, "You should have told *somebody*..."

"I know, I know! Just give it a rest... please..." Greyshard replied, bushing out her fur.

Crystalwing heaved a breath and suggested, "Why don't you take them to the nursery. they must be exhausted after all- that..."

Greyshard nodded and scooped up the two kits with her tail. she paused next to Owlstar and whispered something into the fawn she-cat's ear. Owlstar's eyes widened, and she stared at Greyshard, a mix of anger and shock glittering in her eyes. Slowly, she nodded

and stepped back. Greyshard dipped her head and padded out of the den. The two kits followed her, glancing back curiously at Owlstar.

The AirClan leader murmured something into Crystalwing's ear, and the calico exhaled disapprovingly.

"I thought you were the sensible one, Treepaw." Owlstar muttered. Rockpaw caught his breath as Owlstar's yellow eyes fell on the branches that they were hiding behind. Treepaw glanced at him, fur bristling.

"Get out of here before Greyshard sees you and don't let me catch you eavesdropping again." Owlstar meowed, turning back to Crystalwing.

Treepaw tugged at Rockpaw's tail with her teeth and gestured to the main camp. He looked back at Owlstar and followed her swiftly. When they reached the clearing, Rockpaw stood up and picked a twig of yew out of hi shoulder fur.

"Can you believe that?!" Treepaw exclaimed, swishing her black-striped tail. "Greyshard- and- just- just everything that we heard!"

"I still don't..." Rockpaw muttered to his sister, feeling his heart thumping. "And how Owlstar reacted..." he added, "It was... sort of expected, but it was still weird seeing her angry like that."

"Brings back memories from our kithood I bet." Treepaw meowed, smirking slightly.

"Shush." Rockpaw swatted her with his paw.

She ducked and scampered off towards the apprentice den, Rockpaw chasing gleefully after her, but his heart and head still whirring. He spotted Blossompaw's tail whisking into the nursery and skidded to a stop.

Treepaw ran on a few more tail-lengths before stopping abruptly. "What is it?" she asked, padding up to him slowly.

"Hmm? Oh, nothing, it's just that..." Rockpaw rolled the words over

in his head.

"Yes...?" Treepaw inquired, staring at him inquisitively.

"Do you think we should..." Rockpaw discarded the thought and finished quickly, "...go get some fresh-kill for the elders?"

Treepaw gaped at him, then started to nod slowly.

"What?" Rockpaw asked.

"Eh, nothing. It's just that I'm wondering when StarClan bestowed some consideration upon you." Treepaw shrugged innocently.

Rockpaw choked on a laugh and meowed, "The way you worded that is just..."

"Haha. I know!" Treepaw chuckled and lead him over to the fresh-kill-pile.

When they reached it, they grabbed a rabbit each and walked the few tail-lengths to the elder den. Rockpaw followed Treepaw through the tall tunnel and blinked to get his eyes used to the smoky darkness. The light behind him gave enough golden glow to illuminate an unnaturally square cave, with weird, broken-down, wooden structures scattered across the edges of the floor. The elders were laying in their nests, most of them sleeping. The structures were made of Twoleg-cut wood planks, stuck together with the hard, silver thorns; many of them had fallen into pieces, but those which were mostly whole were used as nests - filled with moss, ivy vines and wads of pine needles.

Fallenbranch looked up from where she was sharing tongues with Halfheart. Her brown ears perked up and she smiled at the two apprentices.

"Hey." She greeted them, then added playfully, her eyes gleaming, "I see Rockpaw finally got rid of the thistledown in his head. Or am I looking at Blossompaw?" she chuckled friendly and yawned.

Rockpaw knew she was joking, but his still ached whenever cats mocked him like that. *I guess good first impressions* do *help.* he

thought bitterly, gripping the rabbit tighter in his jaws. He put it down in the middle of the cave, as did Treepaw.

Halfheart lifted her head and nudged Dapplewind with her back leg.

"Hmm?" he murmured drowsily, sniffing the air and opening his pink eyes as wide as he could, which wasn't much. The tangled scars across them held down his shredded eyelids. "Oh, hello Treepaw and Rockpaw. Thank you for the rabbits." He yawned widely and woke Blackeye, while Fallenbranch aroused Redsplodge. The elders shared the two pieces of prey among them and started to eat.

"Come here." Halfheart meowed, flicking her tail. "I think Redsplodge is in a good enough mood to tell a story. That is - if you ask politely."

Redsplodge scoffed at her denmate and sighed, trying and failing to look grumpy, "Fine. What do you want?"

Treepaw rushed up to them and gingerly took a rabbit leg from Halfheart, bringing it over to Rockpaw.

"Can it be about the Three, please?" he asked eagerly, laying down bedside Treepaw.

"Or about Darktail!" Treepaw added, pricking her ears enthusiastically.

Redsplodge glanced between them and smiled ruefully. "The Three it is."

"Yes!" Rockpaw exclaimed, feeling the gnawing dread about the kits crumble away, only to be replaced with excitement.

"Aw, ok!" Treepaw took a bite from the rabbit and waited for Redsplodge to continue.

"Ekhem- so, a long, long, *long* time ago, when the Clans were still in the old forest, the great Firestar was visited by a StarClan cat..." Redsplodge began, draping her tail across her back, while everyone

in the cave listened in.

Word Count: 1724
Yes! My streak is being kept!
Thanks for all the views and support! Really. I never thought I'd get this far. Thanks ♥□♥□♥□
Have a great day everyone and I hope you enjoyed this chapter <3

Chapter 24

[image]

Slipping under the branches of the nursery, Blossompaw shifted the wads of leaves in her mouth. As she entered, a sudden hiss sounded, only to break off.

"Oh, it's only you Blossompaw. Never mind, Silverwhisker, you can relax now." Blossompaw heard Morningheart's voice meow and saw the she-cat's silhouette brightening.

"Ok, good, go on kits, go out to play, you're all taking up too much space and Greyshard needs her privacy." Silverwhisker said from behind Morningheart.

Four greyish shapes rushed past her, followed by three gingery ones. Blossompaw looked around the den, trying to force her eyes to get used to the dim light. She loved how the twisting branches of the bramble stuck down and, skinned of thorns, made bases for the nest in the nursery. it all looked so safe and comfortable, the pale golden light speckling the leaf-covered floor.

"Greyshard? Where did you go?" Blossompaw called softly into the grey shadows, laying the herbs down for a moment.

"She's in the corner, sweetie." Morningheart meowed, and her dark, pine-green eyes gleamed.

"Ok, thanks," the apprentice answered, picking up the leaves and padding carefully towards the back of the den.

At the back of the den, in a spare pile of moss, Greyshard had laid down, back towards Blossompaw. Blossompaw put the bundles of leaves down beside the thick, main stalk of the bramble.

"C... can I see the kits, please?" she asked quietly, peering over Greyshard's blue-grey shoulders.

"Mhm." Greyshard murmured back, and stood up, revealing two kits crouching next to the bramble wall. The tortoiseshell nudged them with a paw and muttered, "Go on, Blossompaw needs to check you up."

"Oh... o-ok..." the gingery-brown one meowed, cautiously stepping out of the moss.

The weirdly-patterned brown tabby followed, staying behind his sister, but edging out slowly. When they passed from under her, Greyshard settled back into the nest, watching the kits intensely. Blossompaw gestured them over and sat down near the trunk of the bush.

"What are your names?" she asked, feeling her voice rattling gently in her throat.

The she-kit glanced back at Greyshard before answering, "I'm Coco."

"I'm Taffy." The tabby meowed, then added, tilting his head, "Why are you speaking so quietly? It's not as if there are any kits to wake up."

What peculiar names. I wonder- Blossompaw thought, only to break off as 'Taffy' asked his question. She was dumbstruck for a second, but she regained her composure, "I'm partially mute. It means that I usually can only talk in a whisper, or my throat really hurts."

"Woah, cool!" Taffy exclaimed, flicking his tail.

Greyshard's ears perked up and she scalded, "It's not *cool*! How would you like it if your throat bled every time you tried to raise your voice?"

Blossompaw felt an unusual rush of anger. She hated it when cats saw her like that - a helpless, little, weak apprentice, who crippled every time she tried to talk. It was just so unfair that being mute made everyone feel sorry for her. *I swear, the only cat in this Clan who doesn't swoon over me is Treepaw, and she's my sister! She* should *be overprotective of me, but... she isn't. Good. I'll show them one day, I can be as strong as any of them.*

"Uh, Blossom...? What's wrong?"
She jumped slightly and looked down at Coco, blinking. "O-oh, nothing! I was just thinking. Here, eat this," she opened one of the dock leaves to reveal a pile of powdery, slightly damp, dull green stuff. "...while I check your heartbeats."

Coco stared at the leaf, then imitated retching. "Ewwwww! That looks like the green stuff in ponds!"

"Yeah!" exclaimed Taffy, "I'm *never* eating that!"

Blossompaw sighed and explained, "It *is* that 'green stuff in ponds'. Chlorella, that's what it's called. And I would be very grateful if you eat it, because it'll help keep your bodies strong and healthy."

"We already are strong and healthy!" Coco countered, leaning back from Blossompaw and making a disgusted face.

"Well- to be completely honest, you're not." Blossompaw replied apologetically. She coughed and felt her ears start to flatten to her head. She forced them up and breathed in deeply. She added, "Just eat it please. You need it."

Hesitantly, Taffy approached the chlorella pile and sniffed at it. He winced away, but, grimacing, stretched his neck towards it and lapped up a tiny mouthful.

As soon as it entered his mouth, he lolled his tongue out, hinging his mouth wide open. He 'vomited' it onto the ground and backed away, scraping his tongue against his teeth.

"Nope! Never! You can't make me! It's horrible!" he raged, shaking his head wildly.

Coco stared at him with wide green eyes, then at the chlorella and Blossompaw.

The medicine cat apprentice let her shoulders droop. She wished she could exert as much authority as Crystalwing or Owlstar, or even Treepaw. It would be so much easier than everyone ignoring her because she was mute.

"Just. Eat. It." She ordered, trying to sound authoritative.

"No." Taffy turned his head and tensed his haunches.

"You have to eat it and let me check you. Now." Blossompaw meowed.
Suddenly, she felt her eyes burning, as if they were being covered in water. Coco stared up at her with wider eyes than ever. Then, the she-kit reached her head forwards and licked up a small pawfull of the chlorella. She winced and swallowed it with narrowed eyes. Taffy, surprise clearly etched on his face, followed suit.

"G-good." Blossompaw muttered, feeling her stomach twist. She gulped and breathed in.

She opened the second dock leaf and pulled out a couple of aloe vera stems. "These will taste much better. I promise. Chew them slowly and long, alright?"

"Ok..." Coco shook out her fur and took one of the bright green stems in her tiny white teeth. She started to bite it thoroughly, as did Taffy.

While they did so, Blossompaw nudged their legs apart and pressed her ear to their chests, listening to their heartbeats. It was slightly faster than it should be, but that was understandable. She watched them swallow the aloe vera and nosed the dock leaves together.

"I'll be back in a moment." She meowed, waving her tail, "I just need to get you all some water." Turning to the other queens, she asked, "Is there anything you need?"

"No thanks," Morningheart answered, smiling.

"It's ok," added Silverwhisker.

"Ok. See you in a moment." Blossompaw turned around and trotted out of the den, blinking furiously in the sunlight that followed.

When her eyes grew accustomed to the light, she looked around at the clearing, breathing out calmly. A flicker of movement caught her eyes, and she saw her two siblings by the fresh-kill-pile. They

scooped up a rabbit each and padded off to the elder den. Blossompaw's feet itched for her to join them. They would probably be listening to stories and myths in a few moments, while she had to look after rogue kits and carry bunches of stinking leaves across camp.

She sighed and shook her head, trying to focus on something positive. Blossompaw padded towards the dirtplace and, depositing the bundles of dock leaves, returned into the camp. She headed towards the medicine den.

Pushing through the yew branches, she saw Owlstar and Crystalwing straightening up sharply. Silence filled the den and Blossompaw looked blanky at her mentor and mother.

After a few more heartbeats of quiet, Blossompaw meowed awkwardly, "Can I have some of the spare moss, please?"

Owlstar just stared at her, making Blossompaw feel like she was being glared at by a hawk. Finally, Crystalwing replied hurriedly, "Yes, yes. Here, I'll get you some." The calico turned around and rummaged in a pile of moss near the wall of the den.

She returned to Blossompaw and handed it to her.

Blossompaw mumbled thanks and backed out of the den, allowing the fur on her spine to bristle as soon as they were separated by a wall of yew.

What was that*? They- they must have been talking about me, or else they wouldn't have fallen silent when I came in. But then, it was a private conversation either way, maybe they would've done that if anyone came in. Perhaps I'm just being paranoid, like Skunkpaw. Oh, well...* Blossompaw's mind buzzed with thoughts as she dipped the piece of moss in the stream.

"Hey, Blossompaw!"

She turned around.

A group of kits, half of them ginger, the other grey, rushed up to her, Stormkit - the oldest of all the kits - in the lead.

"Who were those two weird kits that came in with Greyshard?" the blue-grey she-cat asked excitedly.

Blossompaw didn't say anything as she looked down at the kits. She shook her head and stepped over Risingkit, who was blocking her path.

"Hey!" she exclaimed, bushing her ginger fur out.

Blossompaw ignored the kits, who were still firing questions at her. she kept dodging them, slipping past them or simply jumping over them. She hadn't realised how much she had grown. *I guess being half-way through an apprentice- warrior- ship- warrior apprenticeship pays off.* she thought.

Finally, she reached the entrance to the nursery and turned to the crowd of jumping furballs. "Sorry, I have to go here, and we need peace and quiet." She told the kits.

"We can be quiet!" Stormkit meowed, which followed in a burst of agreeing mutters from the other kits.

"Sorry, you *can't* go in, and that's final. Go play in the stream or ask the elders for a story." Blossompaw said smoothly, not giving in to the kits' pleas.

Groaning, they dispersed and shuffled over to the stream. Blossompaw nodded with sudden satisfaction and, smiling, ducked through the bramble curtain, into the den.

Word Count: 1644
Hope you like it!
Thanks for so many votes and supportive comments!
Have a great day everyone!

Chapter 25

[image]

As she watched the half moon spill its silvery light onto the rolling hills below, Blossompaw breathed in a breath of the fresh, late Greenleaf air. More than two moons had passed since Coco and Taffy were found at the edge of AirClan territory and the hot Greenleaf season was almost at an end. Particularly at night, she could feel the stuffy breeze becoming lighter and cooler, but not unpleasant.

I can't wait. Blossompaw thought excitedly, from where she perched on the tip of the hill, gazing down at the short stretch of moorland and the woods of towering sequoias. *This is going to be my first Leaf-fall and my first Leaf-bare! And my first time with snow and cold and strong winds and...* She broke off and her ears drooped, as she realised how many things she still had to experience. Her life was so short but there was so much to do and so much to see. Was all she was going to do in it is running around camp with a mouthful of leaves? Blossompaw sighed and slumped her shoulders.

Suddenly, something landed on her tail, trapping it like a mouse under a fox's claws. She whipped around, slipping slightly as she didn't have her tail for balance. Crystalwing was looking at her curiously, pinning Blossompaw's fawn-and-white tail under her white paws.

"Is everything alright? If there's something wrong, you do know you can tell me?" Crystalwing asked politely, tilting her head and releasing Blossompaw's tail. She added, "You look really distracted."

Blossompaw unconsciously fiddled with the long grass at her paws, feeling its smooth, silky flesh slipping between her paw pads. "I-I'm- alright. It's just..." she mumbled quietly, not meeting her mentor's dull blue gaze.

"What...?" Crystalwing inquired.

"Well... I was just thinking... why are we doing this? I-I mean, why are we here and doing what we're doing and not... doing- something else?" she fumbled with her words, feeling awkward.

"Huh," Crystalwing paused for a moment before chuckling, "That's pretty deep stuff for a little apprentice to be worrying about. Well, don't worry." She leaned down and licked Blossompaw between the ears. "You *can* worry about that when you're older than Twotail."

Blossompaw's ears perked up and she half scoffed, half coughed. "I'll be in StarClan by then!" she laughed quietly, taking quick breaths.

Crystalwing shrugged and smiled, "Twotail made it this far, why can't you?"

Hope filled Blossompaw, as if the sun has somehow peered out of the night clouds and started to spill its soothing light beams down her fur. Crystalwing nudged Blossompaw's cheek and turned to point her muzzle to the hill opposite.

"Look," she meowed, "Nettlesplash and Poppyspark are waiting. And I think I can see Maplefrost going through the trees. Let's go."

Flicking her tail, Crystalwing led Blossompaw down the hill and onto the short bit of flat ground before the MoonRock hollow. Soon enough, a ginger-and-white pelt appeared between the shrivelled trees, soon followed by two golden-ish figures, one of which was half the size of both of them. From the more western side of the dead woods, a shining silvery-grey cat stepped into the moonlight and raced swiftly across the bare earth.

The six cats met at the edge of the MoonRock hollow and murmured greetings to each other. Rainfeather and Maplefrost shared a shoulder brush, and Crystalwing meowed *good evening* to the medicine cats. Blossompaw peered around Crystalwing, trying to catch a glimpse of the unfamiliar cream-coloured tom who was standing behind Hawkscreech. She caught his eye and smiled. He turned away, frowning.

They started to make their way down the steep slope, dodging patches of ferns and piles of ivy-and-moss-covered rocks. When they

all finally reached the very bottom of the hollow, the now-eight medicine cats spread around the dim MoonRock in their usual places. Blossompaw saw, as she leaned around the corner of the rock, that only the cream tom was looking hesitant about coming forward. He stood apart from them all, at Hawkscreech's flank.

A whisper of wind flew across the hollow, dipping down into it to stir the grass and throw up scatters of flower petals. It whistled and twirled, ducking around the gathered cats and pulling at their fur. In a matter of heartbeats, Blossompaw knew what was going to happen and blinked her eyes rapidly. Between strokes, she saw the tom staring at her.

Blossompaw knew by now, that every time this exact gust of wind blew, the clouds were about to be blown off the moon and its light would shine down on the MoonRock, filling the hollow with a breath-taking silvery-blue light. And it happened. Her eyes blinked a few more times and stopped, as the light flooded through her fur and illuminated the entire congregation.

The MoonRock shined a bright blue, tinged with streaks of lavender, silver and pale pinkish-grey. Blossompaw saw the tom wincing back and shutting his eyes. Watching him closely, she saw him hesitantly squint his eyes open. His wide, in-awe, green eyes blazed and shimmered.

"May the half-moon meeting of the medicine cats of the Clans now begin." Maplefrost announced to the silent crowd.

Blossompaw didn't realise how quiet it was until she spoke. It was as if the light from the MoonRock filled the hollow with noise, and the wind blowing gently in the moors above was lined with whispers of ancient cats.

"I have something to announce." Hawkscreech stepped forward and waved his tail to the cream tom.
He stepped forward, head held high, but Blossompaw could easily smell the nervousness on him.

Hawkscreech turned to face him, and the medicine cat's ice blue eyes glittered.

"Lionpaw," Hawkscreech began, "Is it your wish to share the deepest knowledge of StarClan as a LakeClan medicine cat?"

Blossompaw's back fur tingled, and her ears pricked up. She hadn't seen a medicine cat apprentice ceremony yet! Apart from her own, of course.

"It is." 'Lionpaw' meowed, nodding soberly.

Hawkscreech lifted his head to the sky and whispered something under his breath. Then, he turned to the MoonRock and continued formally, in a loud voice, "Warriors of StarClan, I present to you this apprentice. He has chosen the path of a medicine cat. Grant him your wisdom and your insight, so that he may understand your ways and heal his Clan in accordance with your will." He then turned back to Lionpaw and rested his chin on the young tom's forehead.

Stepping back, Hawkscreech gestured with his tail to the MoonRock and ordered, "Lionpaw, lie down and sleep in the light that the MoonRock casts, to share tongues with your ancestors. May StarClan bless your dreams and light your path, now and forever onwards."

Lionpaw straightened his back, nodding stiffly, and crouched down in front of the MoonRock, laying his head on his outstretched paws.

One by one, the other medicine cats followed suit, laying down and closing their eyes. Before Blossompaw did so, she glimpsed Lionpaw's amber eyes gleam red in the light of the MoonRock. In that split second, a bolt of icy lightning shot down Blossompaw's spine and her vision was swallowed by a black whirlpool, streaked with long flecks of pale gold.

Blossompaw fell to the ground, slamming into it with a force so hard, she felt the breath *whoosh* out of her body. She stood up shakily, only to be pushed aside by an invisible figure. It felt as if she had fallen through a barrier of water, though her fur was still dry. Blossompaw blinked open her eyes to see Marigoldpaw crouching beside her, breathing heavily.

The tortoiseshell stood up sharply and demanded, amber eyes wide, "What do you think you're doing? Going into the Dark Forest like that! You could've been trapped in there!"

The medicine cat apprentice stared at the StarClan cat with surprise. "'Dark Forest'?" she asked.

"Yeah. 'Dark Forest'. It's a place where dead cats go, when StarClan decides that they're not worthy of entering their skies. Like, when they're evil or something."

"Oh, l-like Tigerstar or Hawkfrost?" Blossompaw asked.

"Yep," Marigoldpaw answered, and added, a bit more calmly, "You can *never* go in there, or you could be trapped there forever."

"Woah... Really?!" Blossompaw flattened her ears and took a step back.

"Yes..." the StarClan she-cat sighed and moved to stand next to Blossompaw.

Her eyes widened as Blossompaw saw the tall, leafy trees of StarClan fade into shrivelled, dead, blackened husks. The rich green grass turned into tufty patches of yellowing weeds and bare, dry earth. In the distance, she saw eery, slimy green glows blinking, scattered throughout the bare tree branches and their withered trunks. Barely a tail-length in front of them, a line of mist rose from the ground, trailing seeming endlessly through the trees, splitting StarClan from the Dark Forest. Or so it seemed.

"Alrighty then, let's get out of here, before someone sees us." Marigoldpaw meowed abruptly, and shoved Blossompaw's paw away from the misty line, where it had involuntarily risen.

Blossompaw followed Marigoldpaw through the ferns behind them, turning back to gaze at the misty, silver line.

After a few minutes of walking, star-covered cats started to appear between the trees, hanging down from the branches or basking on rocks. A few lifted their heads to murmur a greeting to Marigoldpaw, but most of the cats ignored them. Blossompaw

turned back to look at the path they had just came from, but trees and brambles obscured her vision.

Suddenly, Marigoldpaw tumbled to the ground and started laughing. Blossompaw whipped around to see two brown kits wrestling with her.

This is your chance, go! An unfamiliar voice hissed in her head and Blossompaw involuntarily started to trot backwards, following their scent trail away from Marigoldpaw. She turned around and ran through the undergrowth, barely feeling the brambles slamming against her muzzle or the ferns smacking her flank. *Yes, yes! Run quicker!* The voice exclaimed in her head and Blossompaw thought she saw a dim black outline running alongside her, its red eyes gleaming encouragingly. Her senses started to come back to her, and she pushed on.
Ahead of her, the misty white line appeared through the leaves, it's short, swirling fronds waving towards her. The black figure yowled happily, *Almost there! Go on, keep going Blossomp-!*

Blossompaw felt herself jerk backwards and a piercing pain spread up her tail. Her body was pulled backwards, then it shot forwards again and fell to the ground.

Sight and sound disappeared for a moment, before Blossompaw yawned and opened her eyes. The unlit MoonRock sat before her and Crystalwing's paw was nudging her flank.

"Wake up, Blossompaw. Time to leave" her mentor's voice meowed.

Blossompaw flicked her tail and stood up slowly, breathing fast.

What is all of Silverpelt just happened?! She thought in alarm, looking around the hollow.

The sky was now a dull greyish-purple, with hints of gold and pink along the LeafClan horizon. Pale, warm-coloured light bled down the hillside, lighting the grass up. The other medicine cats were calling their goodbyes and congratulating Lionpaw.

Blossompaw waved her tail to him quickly, before hurrying after

Crystalwing, mind still whirring and buzzing.

Word Count: 1887
Streak still going!
Hope you like it!

To be completely honest, I really enjoyed writing that black cat bit. It may or may not be SUPER important later on and I mean LATER on.

Welp, anways, thanks for so many views and so much support! Have a great day, eveyone!

Chapter 26

[image]

"I understand - you've been through a lot and you're not thinking straight. I-"

Greyshard cut Owlstar off with an impatient lash of her tail. "No!" she insisted, "I'm fine! I'm- feeling fine- really. Just- please *do* it. *Please*."

"Greyshard..." Owlstar sighed and tucked her tail around her paws. In the semi-darkness, the she-cat's eyes reflected green. "I don't know how to put it politely, but I'll just say it. Greyshard..."

"Yes...?" The tortoiseshell pricked her ears and straightened her back.

"Stop begging. Just stop. Out of complete honesty, it's getting incredibly aggravating. You have broken the Warrior Code multiple times in the last few moons. You have betrayed me and the Clan's trust. And now you expect me to welcome in a bunch of rogue kits just because you found them out in the wild."

Greyshard's ears drooped, and she squinted through the darkness at her leader. The fawn she-cat was sitting in her nest, with her tail over her white paws and yellow eyes blank.

"Fine. I'm sure if I can break the Warrior Code, then so can you." Greyshard muttered, feeling something wriggle in her stomach.

"Excuse me?" Owlstar tilted her head, twitching her ears.

"Doesn't the Warrior Code say that we must take in *all* kits no matter where they're from?" Greyshard demanded, satisfaction dribbling down her back, mixing with the wave of frustration.

"It says we *help* them. And I have. They'll stay here until they're better, then we'll discuss their future." Owlstar meowed smoothly.

She added, "And yours."

Greyshard stared at Owlstar disbelievingly. She opened her mouth to hiss a rebuke then Owlstar continued.

"I expect that we'll take them to the farm, or the Twolegplace. I'm sure that they'll be plenty of kittypets willing to take them in. Crystalwing has already said that Sky would definitely be on that list."

"S-Sky...?"

Owlstar rolled her eyes and sighed, "Your *mother*-"

"I know who my mother is!" Greyshard snarled, bursting up to stand on her paws. Before Owlstar could reply, Greyshard challenged scathingly, lowering her voice, "So, you're telling me, that there are no cats in this Clan who would take care of *two* kits?! What am I for starters? A ghost?"

"Greyshard." Owlstar rose to her feet suddenly and glared at her. Greyshard fell silent and took a step backwards, fear and worry slithering through her fur like an adder. "This is my final decision. I said no and I mean it. *No*. I can't keep making exceptions for you, just because- You know what, I don't even know why I *do* make exceptions for you! Now listen up, I will not anymore. Stop arguing with me and accept my word. *That's* what the Warrior Code says. If I hear a single word from you about this, I will seriously consider exiling you. Now get out of my sight."

Greyshard stood there, dumbstruck, for a moment more, staring blankly at Owlstar. She couldn't believe her ears. How could Owlstar be so insensitive about this? The kits had just lost their brother and she was already talking about exiling them. And about exiling her...

"Out...!" Owlstar repeated, glaring down at Greyshard with half-bared teeth.

Greyshard whipped around and padded out of the dark den, without looking back at Owlstar. She felt her chest burning and her

paws itching to run. The cave was dark and empty and quiet. Most of the cats had already gone to sleep. As soon as she and Owlstar were separated by the curtain of ivy, Greyshard bounded over to the nursery.

She slipped in carefully and tiptoed to the back of the den. On the way, Greyshard saw Morningheart snoozing, with all four kits laying across her back. Behind her, Silverwhisker's glossy fur glittered in the moonlight, that sparkled through the gaps in the roof. At the base of the far bramble wall, laying in a nest of fresh moss, Taffy and Coco were asleep, tail and paws thrown out. Greyshard laid herself in the remaining moss, curling herself into a tight ball and covering her nose with her tail.

Not long after, she felt herself drifting slowly off to sleep. Her eyelids flickered and her body fell limp. As Greyshard closed her eyes, she jerked back up. Coco had stretched her back upwards, poking Greyshard in the back with unsheathed paws.

I'll never fall asleep with these two on my mind. Greyshard told herself silently. She rose to her paws sighing.

With a quick stretch, she left the den and made her way to the dirt-place-tunnel. She took a quick drink from the stream and raced silently down the tunnel. She sniffed around at the walls of thick undergrowth that surrounded the dirtplace, and found a patch of loose brambles, only just big enough for her, in the corner. Greyshard crouched down on the floor and pushed through the spiny, loopy branches.

A nice, calm walk in the forest ought to do me good. Greyshard insisted to herself.

Dawn seemed to come quicker than normal, as if Greyshard had only been wandering through the tall, thin pines for under an hour. But soon enough, the sun started to turn from dark indigo to a light purple, smeared with pink and orange at the horizon. Silvery-red clouds stretched across the sky and the stars started to blink slowly out.

Greyshard's stomach rumbled, and she looked down at it.

No-one will mind if I eat a mouse or a bird for myself. I'll bring back a rabbit or something to make up for it. Greyshard nodded to herself. Right on time, the branches of the pine to her right rustled. A thick, tall screen of brambles and bracken hid the creature from her. She pricked her ears and turned towards the shrubs. Opening, her mouth, Greyshard could smell... something. An animal definitely, but... what kind? It was nothing like what she had smelt before. It bellowed a deep, low, rumbling sound, a bit like a cow, and Greyshard was startled at how loud it was.

Either a huge*, old bird, or a calf ran away from the farm.* Greyshard thought and ducked through the bushes. On the other side, she saw four, two-toed, pointy black feet. *Definitely a calf. I can do this. I'll jump onto its back and kill it from there. Easy enough.*

Greyshard exploded from the bush and leaped into the air. She froze and tumbled to the ground, as she missed the creature. Looking up, she gasped.
It had the legs of a brown calf, but the body of a cat and the blazing eyes of Owlstar. It turned to her and rose onto its hind legs, bellowing in an ear-splitting, echoing roar, "Greyshard!"

She jerked up in her nest, warm pinkish-gold light spilling into the nursery. Greyshard looked around panickily, breathing faster than usual. She took a deep breath when she realised she was safe. Coco was snuggled into her flank, drool dripping from her wide-open jaws. Taffy was resting his head on Coco's back, ears folded unnaturally.

It was just a dream... She sighed in her head. *A dumb dream.*

Greyshard shook her head and rested her head on her paws. She felt as if she hadn't slept a wink, her muscles aching in her hind legs. As the dawn light glittered through the gaps in the roof, the floor was dappled with a soft yellow and the camp outside started to wake up. cats called to each other, getting ready for patrols.

I should be out there. Greyshard thought bitterly. She stood up and glanced down at Coco and Taffy. *They'll be fine. Owlstar wouldn't do anything extreme.*

She nodded forcefully and padded out of the den, looking nervously from the nursery to the HighMound. Greyshard joined the crowd of cats in the clearing and looked around for who was supposed to be with her on the hunting patrol.

Finally spotting Rockpaw edging towards the fresh-kill-pile, she slipped through the crowd of cats until she towered in front of him, only just blocking his path to the prey.

He looked up, alarm streaking through his pale orange eyes. His wide pupils contracted until they were thin slits of black, like the shadow of a bird on the dawn sky. "Morning," he meowed in a bored voice.

"Good morning." Greyshard replied in an even, yet cold voice, gazing down at him.

"Mhm..." he muttered and glanced around her. "I'll just get one piece of prey and I'll be ready for the patrol."

"Nope." Greyshard blocked him with one leg. "What does the Warrior Code say?"

She heard Rockpaw sigh, but he straightened his back, Greyshard noticing that he had grown taller in the last few moons, and recited, "*Unless they have permission, apprentices may not eat until they have hunted to feed the elders*."

"Good. Thank you." Greyshard nodded, trying to soften her tone. "We'll go on a quick roundabout route around the mountain, then we'll come straight back, and you can eat. Sounds good?"

"Yep," Rockpaw mewed, looking as if he had something else to say.

"Alright. Come on then, you find Rosesong and Briarpaw, and I'll find Foxnose. We'll meet you outside." Greyshard explained, turning around to search for the ginger-furred tom.

"Ok. See you." Rockpaw called after her and padded away.

Greyshard looked back at her temporary apprentice and felt a rush of guilt stab her heart. As he walked away, his ears drooped, and

tail fell limply against the rocky ground.

If I offended him, it's his fault! Greyshard told herself, before feeling another twinge of shame hit her. *But everyone treats him like a rogue or an outcast. No wonder he feels and acts like one-* Greyshard swallowed and promised herself to try to make amends, even if she embarrassed herself in the process.

Word Count: 1649

I know, I know. I'm very sorry for not updating in about a month. Eveb though it's the holidays, I've been incredibly busy, with Christmas, homework and what not.

Anyways, hope you like ot. The next two chapters will be coming out in a few minutes (from when I publish this).

Thanks and enjoy :)

Chapter 27

[image]

"Climb up the mountain, get one of the rocks, and come back down. That's all you have to do. Easy enough, right? You have from dawn to dusk to do it." Wolflungs explained, standing on one of the lower ledges on the base of the biggest mountain.

"Dawn to dusk?" Rockpaw scoffed. "That'll take me an hour. Why do we need to climb up a mountain for our warrior assessment anyway?"

At this, Wolflungs chuckled and replied, "Well, firstly, no cat that I can remember has ever scaled this mountain and back in an hour, especially not an apprentice. And secondly, it'll test your endurance, wits, navigation, speed and power, all in one. That's what the perfect AirClan warrior strives for. To have the all the skills of our WindClan ancestors!"

Rockpaw straightened himself and promised, "Then I'll be the quickest one to do that, I swear I will. I'll climb up the mountain, bring back the rock and- Wait... What rock?"

Wolflungs laughed again and answered, "Many, many, *many* generations ago, when the new Clans had started to settle into their territories, the WindClan settlers had started to think of new ways to bring the ancient Clan traditions here. They thought that it would be too easy to take an apprentice to the MoonRock and just hunt for their assessment, so they decided to use their new territory. The first leader of AirClan, Thistlestar, decided that to pass their warriors assessment, ready apprentices would have to climb the highest mountain in all the territory, bring back something from the top to prove they did it and return to the ground. So he himself climbed the mountain and, when he reached its peak, carved a special symbol into every small rock and loose pebble he could find on there. Legend has it, that the marked rocks will never run out, because he comes down from StarClan every year to carve more rocks.

"After he did that, he returned to the ground. All this took him from dawn to dusk, so he made that part of the rules. Every apprentice from then on, has to show one of the rocks to their mentor, bury the rock deep in the forest, and then they received their warrior names. It is also said that the leader receives an omen from StarClan, specifically Thistlestar, the day before the assessment is to take place. This omen is said to show the leader that the apprentices are ready, and what their warrior names should be. Any questions?" Wolflungs finished with a friendly flick of his charcoal-striped tail.

Rockpaw dug his claws into the damp, dewy grass and looked up at the towering mountain, repressing his fear and nervousness. To scatter the worried 'what if's' in his head, he asked, "What other rules did Thistlestar make for this assessment?"

He saw Treepaw straighten her back next to him, and Skunkpaw's ears and tail quivering on his other side. The pre-dawn light gave a strong enough glow, for Rockpaw to see the immediate area around him, before it blurred back into shadows. Wolflungs turned his head towards the eastern horizon, lifting his muzzle and smelling the air.

"Almost time," he murmured. He turned to the three apprentices and began quickly, "Another one of the rules he added, was that the apprentices have to awake an hour before dawn, which is a nightmare if your assessment was mid-Greenleaf, and hunt down a hare as a group. Then, when you've caught it, you share it between you. This is to test your hunting and collaboration skills, as well as planning ahead and communication. But, of course, you already know this." He nodded at the small mound of freshly-dug-up soil.

Rockpaw nodded, glancing over to where they had buried the bones of the hare. "Anything else we should know about? Like shortcuts or the best route up?" He asked innocently, trying to sound plain curious.

"Oh, no you don't." a familiar voice snapped from behind Rockpaw. He turned around, eyes wide and ears pricked.

A grey tabby appeared out of the shadows of the pines and stepped into the open patch of ground beside the mountain. His orange eyes gleamed in the weak gold light and his tail was held high in the air.

"Mousefoot!" Rockpaw exclaimed, bouncing up to stand on his feet. He started to step forward, but Wolflung's meow interrupted him.

"It's time. The sun's about to come up."

Rockpaw turned to glare at the horizon and his paw twitched forward.

Mousefoot shook his head, his stripes starting to stand out in the growing light. "We'll have time for the pleasantries later," he meowed, "For now," he took a step forward, his back legs shaking slightly, "Go get that rock." He smiled and nodded.

Rockpaw felt an unusual feeling in his stomach. It wasn't just the butterflies squirming around in there, it was joy. Warm and pure. He nodded back and turned back to Wolflungs.

"Wait!" yet another voice sounded behind him.

Rockpaw turned sharply to see Blossompaw pushing through a patch of ferns and burst into the clearing. She rushed up to her siblings, panting and coughing.

"Blossompaw! I thought I told you to stay in camp. We need to stock up on aloe vera gel-" Crystalwing scolded.

"I know, I know." Blossompaw whispered, "I'll go back in a moment."

Crystalwing shook her head and lashed her tail, glancing up at the horizon.

Blossompaw took a step forward to stand directly in front of Rockpaw. "Good luck." She murmured, touching her head to his. She dodged around him and did the same to Treepaw, before quickly nodding at Skunkpaw and disappearing into the undergrowth, Crystalwing glaring after her.

Rockpaw, wide-eyed, looked after her, feeling a warm feeling spread slowly through his chest. He smiled weakly and turned to stand a tail-length from the start of the rock. Treepaw stood on his right, Skunkpaw on his left. Wolflungs hovered on a ledge to their

side, keeping his vivid yellow eyes on the horizon.

"And..." he lifted his tail into the air. "Go!"

As one, Rockpaw and his denmates leaped for the first shelf of rock.

Mousefoot called after him, "Remember to conserve your energy! Don't use it all up at once!"

Flamepelt, for the first time this morning, meowed loudly, "Good luck, 'paws!"

"Remember - you're not allowed to help each other!" Wolflungs repeated for the hundredth time today.

Rockpaw pushed off with his hind legs and leaped for the next ledge, scrabbling with his front claws to get a firm grip. A few more jumps and he reached a strip of flat rock that circled around for this half of the mountain. Treepaw and Skunkpaw crouched either side of him, Skunkpaw panting and his tail tip twitching.

"So..." Treepaw began. "I guess, goodbye?"

"Yeah, see you." Rockpaw meowed.

"Good luck, guys." Skunkpaw mewed.

Rockpaw went straight forward, while Treepaw took a hollow path to the right, and Skunkpaw followed a grassy lane that wound left. In a few heartbeats, they were gone from view. Rockpaw pushed off and clawed his way up onto a wide shelf. All around him on the mountain, small cliffs jutted out, some short and narrow, others long and tall. He chose a jagged ridge on his left and stepped onto it.

He turned around and breathed in sharply. The dawn light seeped onto the rolling forest of dark green under him. Glowing oranges and pinks bled into the green and greys. Each drop of silvery dew was illuminated to a small, glistening drop of gold, sparkling the trees and the fields with warm yellow specks. From this height, the fields and forests under him looked like they were scattered with fireflies. The gentle morning breeze stirred up the grass and

needles, like waves on the lake, sloshing and flowing serenely.

A sudden rush of blue-grey obscured his vision. He tripped back, knocking against the wall of the mountain. Rockpaw got up hurriedly and looked around. A sparrowhawk circled around and landed on a tree not far from the mountain, seemingly watching him with one large amber eye. Rockpaw scoffed and stepped up onto another ledge.

If you keep dawdling like this at every tail-length, you'll never get there first. Rockpaw scalded himself.

He picked up his pace. Rockpaw jumped from ledge to ledge, clawing up every rocky slope and stone ridge that stood in his path. With every tree-length, it grew a slight bit colder, and the wind grew stronger. He barely paused for breath or to see which way to go, only stopping when he met a dead end to navigate himself out of it.

It was an hour or so before sunhigh, when Rockpaw finally looked up to the sky, surprise and delight filling him from ears to tail.

I'm almost there! Just a few more fox-lengths and I'll complete my assessment! He exclaimed silently, a grin curling up his muzzle.

He reached up to grab a small ledge and heaved himself up onto a large platform. Next, he bunched his muscles in his hindquarters and leaped onto a narrow strip of stone. From there, he pulled himself up a steep expanse of rock, using the small, jutting-out ridges to help him. After a few more mouse-lengths, the rock tipped forward and Rockpaw saw the tip of the mountain, butterflies returning to his stomach. He wrapped his front paws around the rocky spike above him and dragged his body onto it.

Silvery rock spread out in front of him, forming a long, wide stretch of greys and greens, before the mountain's peak reached out to the blue sky. He opened his mouth to let the air reach his scent glands. All he could smell was the chilly but soothing mountain breeze, along with the scent of soil and grass. So Skunkpaw and Treepaw hadn't been here yet.

Rockpaw's paws itched, and he felt glee overwhelm him. He rushed forward, nuzzling through long tufts of grass, before he found a flat pebble in no more than a few heartbeats. On it's side, two rough, jagged, wiggly lines were carved, forming the shape of the blowing wind. A few, evenly-spaced dots formed a circle around them, and the wind seems to blow a bit harder. Rockpaw picked up the pebble in his mouth, adjusting it so he could breathe clearly with his nose. The pebble's hard surface scraped uncomfortably against his teeth and tongue.

He followed his scent trail back to the edge of the overhang of rocks and looked down.

With suddenly shaking legs, he gazed down at the seemingly endless expanse of grey. He gulped and slowly started to scale down the rocks.

Word Count: 1796

Chapter 28

[image]

Blossompaw reached out to pull another aloe vera leaf down from the rock shelf, her tail swishing along the rocky floor. Her mind drifted to Treepaw, then to Rockpaw, then to the towering mountain dappled in pale dawn light.

"Blossompaw, concentrate!" Crystalwing exclaimed impatiently. The calico was sorting through dry herbs on the other side of the stream, three piles of leaves growing around her.

The apprentice looked up to glance apologetically at her mentor, before resuming her work. Her job for today was to make more aloe vera gel, as they were running out, and with the cold season approaching, it was always good to stock up on cure-all's. Blossompaw settled her haunches into a more comfortable position and grabbed the tip of the leaf in her jaws. Very carefully, she started to rip the leaf's flesh off with her claws, over and over again, until a small pile of deep green leaf-skin lay beside her. She nudged it away and reached for a dock leaf.

Cautiously ripping the leaf into two, so she was left with a pair of pale grass-green, oblong leaves, Blossompaw laid the two halves in front of her paws. She picked up the flint resting next to her in her teeth and slowly started to scoop out the inside of the leaves. The minty green substance was bundled into the dock leaf.

Blossompaw did this repeatedly, the mounds of leaf waste and gel increasing on all her sides. At one point, her stomach started growling. Crystalwing told her to bring them some fresh-kill to share and after they finished, they resumed.

They did this until Crystalwing stood up and stretched her front legs.

"Right," she meowed. "Let's go get some fresh air and clean up. Then, there's something we need to do."

"Ok!" Blossompaw meowed happily and rose to her paws. She started to gather up the shredded aloe vera skin and bundled it all up into a large dock leaf. When she was finished, she follow Crystalwing into the clearing.

Past-sunhigh light shined into the camp, lighting up most of it. Blossompaw shook out her pelt and trotted behind her mentor, gazing around the sunlit cave. The kits were playing outside the nursery. Coco and Taffy, now almost as big as Silverwhisker's kits, were watching Stormkit's display of the hunting crouch.

Blossompaw smiled around the dock leaf and stepped into the dark entrance tunnel. For a few moments, she padded through darkness, Crystalwing's long tail tickling her nose. Finally, light started to edge into her vision and the criss-crossing outline of the brambles covering the entrance were silhouetted against the blurred forest background. Crystalwing pushed through the spiny tendrils, leaving a clear path for her apprentice.

A few tail-lengths from the entrance, Blossompaw deposited the dock leaf next to a thicket of bracken and breathed in a large mouthful of air.

"Follow me." Crystalwing ordered and Blossompaw obliged.

To her great surprise, Crystalwing led her to the northern part of the territory, where the pines thinned out and the moorland continued. There, her mentor picked a stretch of flat ground, and, for the rest of the day, they practised battle moves and tactics.

When they finally returned to camp, Blossompaw was exhausted and, after a quick shared meal, Crystalwing allowed her to go to sleep.

Blossompaw slept deeply that night, no Marigoldpaw hissing in her ear or prophecies echoing through her head.

The soft dawn call of birds awoke her early in the morning the next day. She stood up and yawned widely, arching her back high in the air. Absent-mindedly, Blossompaw padded out of the den, blinking slowly and yawning again. Head down, she pushed through the yew

branches and exited the medicine den.

Quietly, as to not disturb anyone, she trotted across camp and sat down in a pool of weak sunlight. Blossompaw closed her eyes and felt the warmth increasing slowly. The greyish-red she saw through her eyelids turned to a crimson colour, then to a flame-orange and amber.

"Why, you're up early." A voice murmured nearby.

Blossompaw turned around slowly to see Fallenbranch limping up to her.

"H-how did you...?" Blossompaw began but stopped herself just in time.

"What? Walk up to you without making a sound with this useless thing?" Fallenbranch inquired, shaking her stumpy leg.

"N-no! I-I didn't mean it l-like that! I-" Blossompaw stammered quietly, rising to her paws quickly.

"Nah. It's fine. I don't mind. I've been hated on with this thing more than you'd imagine. Swooned on as well." Fallenbranch chuckled, sitting down next to Blossompaw.

"Yeah..." Blossompaw murmured, turning back to the hole in the cave wall and sitting down.

"I guess you've been as well, though, so you can relate."

Blossompaw's eyes widened, and she turned to look back at the pale tabby.

She smiled and meowed with amusement in her voice, looking up at the roof of the cave, "Don't kid me, Blossompaw. I've seen your face when Halfheart calls you 'poor dearie'. I've seen you cringe away and wince when someone comments on your muteness. I may not be able to fully understand what you feel, but I know what it- well- *feels* like." She sighed and closed her eyes.

The apprentice stared at Fallenbranch and whispered, trying to fill

every word with gratefulness, "Thank you."

"Ah, no problem." Fallenbranch replied. She touched her pink nose to Blossompaw's forehead and meowed, "Don't let them get you down. You can be whatever you want, without their sympathy. I mean - just look at me." She winked playfully and stood up. "Well, see you after the ceremony."

With that, Fallenbranch limped off, her tail held straight up in the air. Blossompaw smiled after her and rose to her paws as well. She hadn't even noticed it, but the Clan had started to gather around the HighMound, murmuring excitedly.

Blossompaw hurried over to slip through the gathered cats and sat down at the front of the crowd. A few seconds later, Rockpaw, Skunkpaw and Treepaw stepped into view, followed by Tall-Leaf, Scarclaw, Owlstar and Icefang. Skunkpaw's parents sat down together, purring loudly, a few tail-lengths from Blossompaw. Scarclaw padded up to Blossompaw and, grinning, sat down next to her. Owlstar leaped onto the HighMound and waited for the Clan to fall silent.

"I, Owlstar, leader of AirClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you and warriors in their turn." Owlstar announced formally, her deep yellow gaze sweeping across the crowd. She fixed her eyes on the three soon-to-be-warriors and continued, "Rockpaw, Skunkpaw and Treepaw. Do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect and defend your Clan, even at the costs of your lives?"

"I do."

"I do."

"I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names." Owlstar stepped down from the HighMound and gestured to Rockpaw. "Rockpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Rockclaw. StarClan honours your bravery and resilience, and we

welcome you as a full warrior of AirClan." Owlstar rested her chin on Rockclaw's head, and he licked her shoulder. She whispered something into his ear and holding back a beaming smile, stepped back.

"Rockclaw! Rockclaw! Rockclaw!" chanted the gathered cats, Blossompaw joining in as loudly as she could.

Owlstar stepped towards Skunkpaw and declared, "Skunkpaw, from this moment on you will we known as Skunkpelt. StarClan honours your honesty and commitment, and we welcome you as a full warrior of AirClan." Owlstar repeated the same gesture as with the newly-named Rockclaw, and the Clan called:

"Skunkpelt! Skunkpelt! Skunkpelt!"

Finally, Owlstar turned towards Treepaw, barely hiding a huge smile. She meowed loudly, "Treepaw, from this moment on you will be known as-" For a split second, Owlstar hesitated, and Blossompaw thought she could make out the outline of a blue-grey she-cat standing next to her. then, Owlstar continued, her ears twitching, "Treestripe. StarClan honours your kindness and forethought, and we welcome you as a full warrior of AirClan." Again, Owlstar rested her head of Treestripe's, and the brown tabby licked her leader's shoulder.

The Clan cheered, "Treestripe! Treestripe! Treestripe!"

Blossompaw rushed to congratulate her siblings, licking them and calling their new names until Crystalwing rushed her away to give her another dose of honey.

Word Count: 1416

Author's Note & Extra

I just really want to thank you guys. This book - *all* my books really - have gotten more views and support than I ever could have imagined possible. Especially as this is my first fanfiction and proper book, I cannot believe my eyes when I look at the stats. Thank you so, so, SO much ♥

Anyways, I hope you enjoyed reading this book. Please tag anyone who you think would like to as well.

I hope you don't mind if I take a break between writing the next book, because I feel like my schedule is incredibly packed already.

Thank you again and have a great day everyone <3

~~~~~

As a little end-of-book celebration, I've made a little mini-game for this!

Remember the heading pictures on every chapter/part? Well, for this, you have to comment down what cat you think it is! It'll always be a cat that appeared in that particular chapter, except for a few that I will mention. Anyone who guess them all correctly, gets to have one of their OC's to be in my future books.

Good luck!

Comment down this form to take part! If I see that you've got them all correct, I'll delete your comment and pm you. If you've only got a few wrong, I'll point them out to you.

Allegiances - (CLUE: It's a higher ranked cat)

Map - Cat View -

Map - Twoleg View - Mudkit (Marigoldpaw's dead brother)
~~~~~

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Thank you very much for bearing with this wild rollercoaster of a book. I really appreciate every vote, comment and praise. Thank you ♥